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Ursula Brumm

SYMBOLISM AND THE NOVEL

We live in the age of symbolism in literature. But we accept the fact calmly, if with no particular enthusiasm. For symbolism makes no burdensome demands on us; it exacts neither tragic participation nor the effort of precise reflection, above all it entails no decision for or against anything. Indeed we are scarcely conscious of its ascendency. Symbolism has pervaded poetry long enough for us to be perfectly accustomed to it. Its conquest of the novel and the drama has been gradual and unobtrusive. And in both these fields its ascendency has for the most part been discreetly camouflaged under a deliberate show of realism. The triumph of symbolism as a habit of thought is most strikingly evidenced by the considerable number of critics who, in their enthusiasm for symbols, more and more unqualifiedly equate literature with symbolism. The symbol has come to be the major criterion of literary value. "Since symbolism is the necessary condition of literature, all novels are symbolic," says William York Tindall in his *The Literary Symbol* (1955). So far as I am aware, this flat statement and others similarly dogmatic have not so far aroused objections except from Philip Rahv in his essay "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction" (*Kenyon Review,* Spring 1956). To support his thesis Tindall adduces a number of modern novels (by Henry Green, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce), the symbolic elements in which he merely assembles and presents without critical evaluation. To go symbol hunting in the novel is a highly popular sport these days. If a novel contains symbols that you can pick out like raisins from a bun, it can claim to be literature.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the nature and function of symbols in the novel. Lyric poetry, which is governed by wholly different laws, lies outside the scope of the discussion. Our aim is to

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define, as exactly as possible, the role played by symbols in prose literature. This is no simple task, for both symbol and novel are essentially collective concepts, which respectively lump together the most diverse varieties of symbolism and narrative fiction. Precision, perhaps even extreme simplification in statement, can alone shed light on the very complex relations between novel and symbol, and I am well aware of the dangers inherent in this approach. I am also aware that finding even one critical flaw in the armor of symbolism is a sure way of making oneself unpopular these days.

Although the historical approach to any critical problem is now considered hopelessly outmoded, we do need the perspective of history, if only as a check against our private prejudices and currently accepted views. And in fact the historical test shows that the prevailing opinion cannot be right: Symbolism, in the specific sense developed by modern writers, is not the necessary condition of literature, nor are all novels symbolic. (For neither we nor the proponents of the dogma take it to mean every work of art is vaguely symbolic for the simple reason that it represents life.) The great nineteenth-century novel is not the product of an imagination working in symbolic forms. It is a representation of life, but not a symbolic representation. Stendhal, Balzac, Tolstoy, to mention only the greatest, did without symbols in the specific sense; for many good reasons, there is no room for the symbol in their works. This most significant tradition of the novel is non-symbolic, or at least neutral in regard to the symbol.

In its origins the European novel, in contrast to the early American novel, is a child of the Age of Enlightenment and of historicism. The so-called realistic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is empirical in both its attitudes and its technical procedures. It is realistic, not because it set out to produce an absolutely faithful re-creation of reality, but because it holds that only what actually is can furnish trustworthy data concerning our destiny as human beings. In this sense it is agnostic, sceptical, empirical, and secular. In his *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) Ian Watt has shown that the novels of Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson were born of the same *Zeitgeist* as the philosophies of Locke and Descartes. They are critical and unprejudiced studies of life as represented by memorable personages whose destiny is determined by their individual character,

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by their particular place in society, and by the times they lived in and the ideas prevalent in those times. (That our contemporary critics choose to regard these characters simply as the product of their social status is another prejudice that will not stand the historical test.) The same is true of the novels of Stendhal, Balzac, and Tolstoy. The particular classical form of the novel which they created and which has received the rather dubious designation of "realistic" (for simplicity's sake we shall use the term too) is in a certain sense anti-symbolic, for it is opposed to the entire class of elements to which the symbol belongs. The realistic novel owes its origin to rejecting the paradigms that had for centuries determined literary forms: fable, legend, myth, and the traditional, typical stories and characters from the storehouse of world literature that were constantly being reworked (i.e., the "archetypes" that have become so popular again today). The realistic novel is against types, against the changeless decked out in varying guises, against the authority of the eternal and the accepted. It is concerned with the individual and idiosyncratic, that is, the particular in its particular circumstances, with reality as experienced by the individual as constituting the only genuine version of reality. The realistic novel is the purest embodiment in literature of the modern scientific sceptical approach (but how quickly the "modern" becomes old and passé!) for which only an observed and measured reality was valid as the raw material for cognition and creation. Only this kind of reality seemed reliable enough to serve the novelist as the basis for a portrayal of life. This attitude has little use for symbols, since a symbol always represents something that remains to be demonstrated, unless it has already been accepted on faith.

In its empiricism the classical novel was at one with historiography, which, just at this time, and setting out from similar intellectual principles, was tremendously enlarging its field of operations and its horizon. Like historiography, the novel proposed to investigate and depict the concrete and specific form of reality at a particular time in a particular place. Hence the historical element, and especially the element of contemporary history, has an important and indeed indispensable place in these novels. There is scarcely one of them that does not establish the historical period of the events within the first few pages. *"Le 15 mai 1796, le général Bonaparte fit son entrée*

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dans Milan"—so Stendhal begins *La Chartreuse de Parme,* and this event is the fulcrum in the life and destiny of Fabrizio del Dongo. But it is never the mythopoeic aspect of history which these writers seek out and emphasize; history is always referred to the individual. Even situations that invite mythopoeic treatment are passed over, and indeed, whatever illusion naturally attaches to such situations is consciously destroyed. Stendhal "disenchants" Napoleon's battles; Tolstoy "demythifies" the great fire of Moscow. He states emphatically that it was not set by the inhabitants to demonstrate their and Russia's spirit of resistance. It was no patriotic beacon and no symbol; the city was built of wood, and therefore was bound to go up in flames when the citizens left and enemy soldiers moved in. The exact empirical truth means more to Tolstoy than even the most apt symbolic interpretation. A symbolist would say that here the artist in Tolstoy was defeated by the historian. But the truth is that we here have a manifestation of the principle of the historical novel, which derives the meaning of events solely from experienced and duly established reality.

What are the principles of artistic creation in this kind of novel? The most important principle has to do with subject matter. Almost all of these novels were written for the sake of the great discovery of the age, the personality of the individual; it is this that shapes the novel. Julien Sorel, Fabrizio del Dongo, Balzac's many heroes, Pierre Bezukhov, Prince Andrey, and Anna Karenina are personalities of fascinating interest, and as such they justify the work of art. They are characteristic, but they are not typical. On the contrary, they are unique and incomparable, but they are so constructed that in them the problems of the human situation stand out with particular force. If it is the task of the novel to show how character, milieu, historical period, and the individual's relations to others shape his destiny, there can be no further question as to what principle governs the selection of subject matter. It must be the principle of a causality, not precisely demonstrable but accepted because factually present, between the external world and human actions, the same causality that in a wider context is also the concern of the historian. Certain elements in the specific circumstances shape the actions and destiny of the hero. Hence certain details of the circumstances are important; and so the novelist depicts them for the reader. Stendhal begins his

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Le rouge et le noir with a quite full description of the small and not especially interesting village of Verrières. Verrières is significant only with respect to Julien Sorel. It constitutes the particular reality into which he was born and which he tries to leave behind; in addition it is characteristic for petit-bourgeois life in provincial France at that particular time. Or take Ippolito Nievo's great novel of 1867, *Confessions of an Octogenarian,*[1] recently rediscovered in Italy, with its description of the picturesque but shabby castle of Fratta, north of Venice, where the hero, a penniless relative of the castellan, spent his youth toward the end of the eighteenth century. Nievo depicts the dilapidated towers, the archaic cavern of a kitchen, the incompetent administrative hierarchy, the inhabitants of the castle and their diversions.

Are these symbols? In the specific sense, they are not. They are genuine components of empirical reality, taken into the novel as such components and not because they have the capacity to be images. But they are components in which the forces that shape this empirical reality concentrate and become visible. From this point of view they are seen to concretize the meaning sought in reality. The castle of Fratta, though not the village of Verrières, comes close to being a symbol. It is in a certain sense "a visible sign of something invisible," insofar as it is taken to express forces that remain partially invisible because they can only be conceived in the abstract. The old castle, still managed in accordance with feudal custom, is among other things also a symbol of the superannuated and chaotic conditions prevailing in Italy at the time. Or better, it is the concrete and particular expression of the ideas and forces that shape the reality, and as such it can assume the functions of a symbol. The outstanding difference between such "realistic" symbols and the symbols of modern literature is that, unlike the latter, the former are not compact images that make a single strong sensual impression, but are often extensive and not easily delimitable segments of reality. In addition they are always genuine components of reality, actually to be found in it (the true realist does not manipulate reality to produce them); they are not indications added by the author simply to make his meaning clear. This difference already shows the difference between

1 The original title of the posthumously published book was *Confessions of an Italian.*

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the realistic and the symbolic novel. The former seeks meaning in actual experience and is content to be taught by it; the latter imposes a particular meaning on reality. Correspondingly, the symbol in the realistic novel is always causally related to its meaning—the symbol represents the hidden cause; whereas in the symbolic novel it is a transcendent embodiment of the intended meaning: for example, a lamb can stand for an innocent victim or a bird with a broken wing for a frustrated longing.

Because the structure of the Italian states had degenerated in the eighteenth century, life in Fratta had precisely these characteristics, and hence the castle can also be seen as a symbol of conditions in Italy. In this case the symbolic function is a secondary, subordinate quality of the phenomena, their primary role remaining in their import as reality. This of course does not mean that the realistic novel excludes phenomena and images which the characters in the novel interpret metaphorically in relation to their own lives, as for example when the defeated hero sees the gallows by the roadside as a symbol of his unsuccessful life. These and similar symbols are always subjective interpretations by the characters in the novel, not by the author. The realistic author wants to see the phenomena of this world in their objectivity, and he sees them in all their characteristic configuration and multiplicity, for their particular configuration is precisely what holds at least a partial meaning for him. In contrast, the symbolist boldly undertakes to reduce the multiplicity of phenomena to the level of signs. He dematerializes the world, and in so doing deindividualizes it, deprives it of specific characteristics. It is not an accident that modern symbolic novels grow shorter and shorter.

Since the realistic symbol is a direct reflection of the intended meaning, it has "expressionistic" potentialities, which, boldly conceived, lead directly to the Expressionist technique of the twentieth century. The symbolic novel, on the other hand, descends not from the realistic but from the romantic novel. To voice whatever meaning is intended, Expressionism renounces the empirical probability of events. Symbolism achieves the same end by renouncing the causal connection between meaning and image; it gives the image a transcendent meaning. The difference between the realistic and the transcendent symbol can be illustrated by a comparison. In *The Literary Symbol,* W. Y. Tindall cites only one example from the realm of the

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realistic novel. Referring to Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina,* he writes: "When Vronsky . . . rides his mare to death at the races, breaking her back by his awkwardness or zeal, his action, unnecessary to the plot and far from realistic, embodies his relationship with Anna." Here we have a situation, of rare occurrence in Tolstoy, where the author manipulates events in the interest of a symbolic foreshadowing. Yet the symbol remains realistic, for horse-racing, as every reader of the novel knows, is a natural element in the life of the Russian aristocracy. The animal that Vronsky kills clearly belongs in his world. Its death is brought about by his impetuosity and thoughtlessness. And in so far as these contribute to Anna's ruin, the episode can assume the functions of a symbol for the relationship between Anna and Vronsky. If we compare this to Henry James's golden bowl with its mysterious crack, which similarly serves as symbol for the relationship between two lovers, the difference is at once apparent. The bowl exists in the novel solely for the sake of its symbolic character, and by possessing this character it controls the structure of the plot. Tolstoy's symbol is a possible interpretation of a subordinate event which the reader can also take at its face value. But a reader who misses the meaning of James's golden bowl will miss the entire novel. Only in *The Golden Bowl* do we have symbolism in the full sense of the term—the symbol as image, expressing the meaning it is meant to convey in image and not in a causal nexus. For the strange way in which the bowl is found and bought at the no less strange art dealer's establishment after all bears merely a semblance of causal relation to the plot, a semblance that will not stand up under the slightest scrutiny. And between symbol and meaning, between the bowl and the relationship of the two lovers, there is no causal nexus at all but only a mysterious parallel. In addition, the bowl was not cracked by any of the characters in the novel. It is a motif outside the realm of reality, with magic powers. Its breaking releases magic effects, which bring the two lovers together again.

I have called this kind of symbol "transcendent" because here an image embodies a meaning with which it has no direct connection. The golden bowl with its crack stands for little Maggie Verver's imperiled relationship to her princely husband. This kind of transcendent symbol is a belated manifestation of faith, a last faint reflection of religious convictions, a surviving vestige of magic amid the secu-

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larization of our world. For the transfer of meaning to the image does not arise, as in the case of the less pretentious metaphor, from a daring comparison. It stems from the world of faith, myth, legend, fairy tale, magic. It is a parallel, with magic as connecting link. In *The Golden Bowl* the fairy tale elements are clearly visible through the modern disguise. The beautiful daughter of the (dollar-King) father who is looking for a son-in-law; the motif of the wedding gift with the secret flaw or curse, which is rendered harmless by cleverness and persistence—these are age-old fairy tale situations, familiar in a thousand variations. There is even an interesting variation of the wicked stepmother motif. It is this world of fairy tale and myth to which the symbol traces its origin, and it has maintained the closest relationship with it down to this day. It is no coincidence that mythological and legendary motifs, which the early realistic novel would have rejected, appear today in the novel together with the symbol. How strong is the connection between modern symbolism and its mythological origins is apparent from Eliot's "Notes on The Waste Land." Not only the title," Eliot writes, "but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend, *From Ritual to Romance*." As a further source Eliot mentions Frazer's *Golden Bough*. After all, meaning and image are not comparable in rational terms; the connection between them is metasensory.

Even when the symbolic novel does not make use of more or less disguised mythological material, it tends to draw its images from the realms of religion and myth. And this is not so simply because the most striking images are to be found in religion and myth but rather because it is only these realms that provide an authoritative interpretation of the symbol through the belief, or at least a memory of the belief, that genuinely links meaning and image. Symbols without such a mythological past are private inventions, and as such they cannot be counted on to affect our imagination. Virginia Woolf's lighthouse and Eliot's cocktails are feeble results of private symbol-making, as are the railway terminals and gas stations which have recently been so popular as symbols of man's homelessness. On the other hand, when Henry James uses not any random precious object with a crack in it as his symbol, but a golden bowl, he establishes a connection with our memories of the sacred symbol of the

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Grail, which—and James alludes to this—traditionally expresses the sublime and supernatural meaning of human relations.

Symbolism, which has been considered "one of the most sophisticated movements in literary history,"[2] still actually draws its basic sustenance from the faith of a magic-mythical past. The presuppositions for a symbolic literature in our time are two, an imagination hungry for images, and a vague idea that our lives are somehow determined by indefinable principles which operate outside the domain of cause and effect but which have a hidden meaning that manifests itself in external phenomena. This is more or less the credo at which modern man has arrived, and to it the symbolic novel addresses itself. Here lies the secret of its origin and its success. In our souls we are still, or once again, romantics, whether we like it or not. The basic tendency of symbolic literature is its orientation toward the intuited, intangible, indeterminate. To be a Christian is as out of fashion as to be an atheist; one is simply a symbolist, for that leaves all roads open and involves no commitment. "Indirection," "suggestion," and "allusion" are key words of symbolistic criticism and are used as positive criteria in literary appraisal. W. Y. Tindall defines the symbolic novel thus: "As tight and reflexive as poems, symbolist novels *insinuate* their meanings by a concert of elements. Images, *allusions, hints,* changes of rhythm, and tone—in short *all the devices of suggestion*—support and sometimes carry the principal burden" (italics mine). Here vagueness of content has become a criterion of value. It demands the counterbalancing effect of concise form, which hence has assumed such great importance today.

We have tried to reduce the innumerable variations of the symbol in the novel to its two major types: the cause-linked "realistic" symbol, and the transcendent or magic symbol of the poetic novel. Both are creatures of man's imagination in its quest for meaning, and in some of their variants they approach each other quite closely. Thus, for example, we find the realistic symbol for the sake of which reality has to be decidedly tampered with, and the transcendent symbol which is convincingly anchored in reality. Nevertheless, these two types of symbol are of different origin, and it would be false to assume that one has evolved from the other. That they have not

2 Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature,* 1953, p. 4.

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is proved by the basically different mentalities expressed in their opposing attitudes toward reality.

How did the magic symbol enter the novel, the literary form which by its very nature is tied to reality? It is tempting to find the answer in the great influence and great prestige of symbolist poetry, especially that of the French symbolists. And in fact this is essentially true so far as the modern novel is concerned. But it is interesting to note that the lyrical symbolists in their turn found an influential model in the novel. I refer to Novalis's fragmentary poetic novels, especially his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen,* which centers around the "blue flower," the most famous symbol of German Romanticism. In the author's conception, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is a "poetic" and "romantic" novel, that is, a radically unrealistic novel which loftily and deliberately disregards all the conditions of real life. The medieval poet Heinrich von Ofterdingen roams the world searching for the meaning of nature and its laws, the meaning of love and of poetry. The revelation of their meaning occurs, in typically romantic fashion, in the form of legend and fairy tale. Here we have a world completely dominated by the miraculous and the symbolic, with the "blue flower" functioning as a sort of symbol of symbols, representing the most secret meaning of the poet's art. This novel shuns the realities of human life to a degree that has scarcely been attempted since. Henry James's *Golden Bowl,* in which the symbol also has a dominant role, at least maintains the appearances of nineteenth-century reality, even if on closer scrutiny the timeless fairy tale elements show through.

The important role of the symbol in the American novel cannot, however, be adequately explained by models in European romanticism or by the influence of the French symbolists. Symbolism is a native American growth, which flourished in this country earlier and more vigorously than elsewhere. It draws its sustenance from the soil of Calvinism, a fact that again corroborates, in a different way, our observation concerning the ancestry of the symbol in the world of faith. American symbolism is a form of secularized and aestheticized Calvinism. Hawthorne's allegories, Emerson's principle that "every natural fact is a symbol of a spiritual fact," and Melville's scarcely maintained faith in the meaningfulness of the world—"some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are of

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little worth and the round world itself but an empty cipher"—are steps in the progressive secularization of the Calvinist interpretation of the world, which in its turn is indebted to medieval typology and exegesis of the Scriptures. The Calvinist is a realist who accepts the facts of his world and does not try to alter them. He considers it his task to interpret them in the light of Biblical precedents, and to this end he contrives a structure of parallels between Biblical and secular events. Thus he distinguishes himself from other realists by his technique of interpretation, which is not secular and causal but transcendental, which is based on faith, and which establishes supra-sensory points of reference for all things earthly. From this it is only a step to the transcendent symbol, which also operates according to the system of an inner parallelism between meaning and phenomenon, but which has freed itself both from rigid dependence on reality and from the dogmatic bonds of the Calvinist faith. This emancipation was accomplished by the American Transcendentalists, abetted by the European romanticists and romantic philosophers with their faith in fairy tale and myth.

The religious basis of American symbolism was already noted by F. O. Matthiessen in his *American Renaissance,* and observed even more clearly by Yvor Winters. Winters recognized that the Calvinist tradition gave its particular stamp to American literature far into the nineteenth century. Winters's well known essay is an attack on romanticism, and this includes symbolism, though he does not specifically condemn it. Charles Feidelson, in his *Symbolism and American Literature,* has an interesting essay in which he too demonstrates the Calvinist ancestry of this American symbolism. He discusses the same authors as Winters, but his sympathies are decidedly symbolist. His claims for the services rendered by symbolism are of the broadest: "In the central work of Hawthorne, Whitman, Melville and Poe, symbolism is at once technique and theme. It is a governing principle: not a stylistic device, but a point of view." This is no longer literary criticism; as the tone of the passage shows, it is a literary manifesto. The particular *hybris* of the symbolist faith is apparent in the assumption that the symbol is to determine the perspective of the work of art, the "point of view," as Feidelson puts it. Yet Feidelson does see some of the problems inherent in symbolism: arbitrariness of interpretation, anti-rationalism, and, as the final con-

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sequence of the speculative nature of the image-symbol, "the possibility of the meaninglessness of meaning." He tries to meet these problems by improvising a philosophy of symbolism. Starting out from Cassirer, for whom poetry is still a world of illusion and fantasy, distinct from that of logical truth, Feidelson argues: "It is quite possible to take poetry as the norm and to regard logical statements as the fantasy; this indeed seems the more natural outcome of a philosophy which begins in a contrast between logical sign and creative symbol. . . . The symbolist . . . redefines the whole process of knowing and the status of reality in the light of poetic method. He tries to take both poles of perception into account at once, to view the subjective and objective worlds as functions of the forms of speech in which they are rendered." Such a definition is no more than philosophical sleight-of-hand. It is a dialectically dressed up version of a faith whose principal dogma is obviously redemption by "poetic method," by "forms of speech," by style. The dyed-in-the-wool symbolists accepted this faith early; they are even now sacrificing at its altar.

For Melville's Moby Dick, which has both a real existence and a symbolic function, the Biblical-typological interpretation is still partly determinative. For Henry James and his generation the images of the Calvinistic typology have grown pale, and a purely aesthetic motivation replaces the religious one. In Stephen Crane's colorful imagery we see a last reflection of religious symbolism—"the red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer"—but here, as Philip Rahv has pointed out, it assumes a purely decorative function. Here we have the beginning of the aesthetic playing with symbols as images and embodiments of meaning, a typical trap for overzealous critics who try to ascribe a profoundly symbolic value to every image used. It is interesting to note that in other literatures, too, symbolism begins to flourish just at the moment when the religious symbols that had earlier dominated imagination lose their dogmatic hold. James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* derives its dense symbolic structure from the aesthetic use of religious symbols, a technique which in this case is justified and even necessitated by the subject matter, for the hero's road leads from the Church to art. His constant practice of reinterpreting the religious symbols of his childhood in secular terms gives the reader convincing insight into his state of mind.

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Symbolism becomes questionable when themes concerning modern man and his dilemma in a world full of facts and problems are represented in novels composed in the technique of all-dominating symbolism. The result is a discrepancy between theme and technique, for the symbolist has neither sympathy nor patience with the nature of facts and their consequences for man. Writers like Truman Capote, Frederick Buechner, or Jean Stafford escape the dangers of this discrepancy by sublimating contemporary history into a personal essence, depriving it of almost any import. At best they can show contemporary problems as reflected in a mentality which takes refuge in symbols. The case is different with symbolists like Paul Bowles and Malcolm Lowry. In such novels as *The Sheltering Sky* or *Under the Volcano* these writers attempt to use the technique of symbolism in portraying the destiny of politically conscious characters thoroughly aware of contemporary events. Their theme is the failure and final disintegration of the highly civilized mentality of Europeans or Americans; but they do not attempt to evolve their symbols from the reality that is inseparable from the theme; instead, they prefer to take them from some colorful exotic setting. Or rather, they make the entire exotic setting a symbol for the mental state of their heroes. In consequence, they have to transport their heroes to the exotic setting where image-symbols adequate to their problems flourish, to North Africa or to Mexico. But this procedure results not only in negating the causal connection between symbol and meaning, it actually inverts their relationship. Since the image-symbols of disintegration are to be found only in exotic countries, these unfortunate occidentals have to go where they can perish both in reality and symbolically, but under circumstances that bring about their downfall only in the transcendent meaning of the symbol and exclude the realm of causality. The true causes remain unrepresented, just as the world that formed these characters is pushed aside with the symbolist's typical disregard for the factual and characteristic.

Contrary to the widely held opinion, this marks not the high point but the dead end of symbolic fiction. For the sober medium of prose remains bound to the solidity of the world of realities. Its most significant subject matter is man as a spiritual being conditioned by material reality. Dismissing this objective in favor of pure subjectivity is something that only lyric poetry can risk with impunity. Conrad's colonials who perish in the tropics follow their profession

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—making money—and their greed, and suffer the fate they themselves have thereby challenged. But Bowles's and Lowry's heroes drift without will or desire, like lost children, in exotic places that have every appearance of being under the spell of a wicked witch, so deceitful, malicious, and inexplicable is everything that happens there. These novels are fairy tales of evil. Here excessive speculation over meanings has not only robbed the world of reality, but emptied it of meaning.

Much more to the point, even if less spectacular than the oppressive symbolism of these novels, is for example Saul Bellow's comparable story, "Seize the Day." Its literary technique holds to the theme and evolves its images from the theme.

It may be suggested that many young writers today are influenced more than is good for either them or their work by critics who have swallowed symbolism whole and who nourish their enthusiasm by providing symbolic interpretations of all past and present literature without any sense of differences in style. This results in a vicious circle of criticism and creative literature. The natural relationship between the two is reversed and writers are made to go to school to critics. In this way criticism acquires a concealed power to lay down laws and determine the future. No such power rightfully belongs to it. Let us maintain the separation of powers in literature too. Let the critics be content with their judicial functions and let them keep their hands off legislation.

(*Translated from the German by Willard R. Trask*)

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Leo E. Litwak

ALL MEN ARE

I knew a murderer. His name was Smitty, he was spectacled, and lean as a minister's son. I watched Smitty kill two German prisoners. His motive was honorable. Our company had approached a German village decked in white flags and the lead squad, expecting a docile enemy, had marched into a recalcitrant machine-gun nest. A corporal was killed. Now many corporals had been killed. Many sergeants, privates, and officers had been killed. And we were sensitive to this killing. Why, when the man next to you is suddenly decapitated or sliced open or becomes the base for a fountain whose source is his blood, you become terribly sensitive to your own mortality. And if we soldiers were to be honest, that was the effect of buddies dying—not a sense of loss, but an agonizing appreciation of one's own mortality. Smitty captured these two men —who knows whether they were part of that machine gun crew— and he marched them down a gulley where our platoon had ducked when the firing began. This gulley led into the town and had high embankments. We were dispersed along the embankments, huddled down. Smitty followed his two prisoners who marched ten paces ahead of him, their arms raised. The two Germans had lost their helmets. One was an older man. His hair was grey and still matted from the helmet he'd recently discarded. He was tall, and he was very tired. He walked stiffly like a man at the end of a long hike and forced his shoulders back, as if aware that he was being observed by the enemy and wanted to make a good impression. The other was a young boy, short, not taller than Smitty, gaunt, with wild blond hair. He was frightened and kept on glancing at his comrade. When they reached the center of the platoon, Smitty stopped, raised his rifle, and his first shot hit the dirt to the side of

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the young boy. Both prisoners continued marching, their pace unaltered. The boy now stared straight ahead. Smitty's next shot knocked him flat. The bullet kicked him off his feet and his face hit the ground first and he was dead when he fell. Absolutely still. The older man kept on walking. "Hey, Smitty, what are you doing?" I yelled. The old man went down just like the other, three steps away.

I went over to see what Smitty had done.

Smitty explained that one of his pals was killed by the ambush. And so justified the murder. Now, as I said, that isn't honest. We didn't take the killing of our comrades as an outrage. There's not much chance for grief or outrage when fear is dominant. And I've seen brothers watch brothers die without experiencing grief—brothers, who in more placid times loved each other, and would have died for each other. But when death shocks you again and again, love is atrophied, grief yields, and the only emotion that is nourished is fear. So in combat you are prepared for any death but your own. Smitty didn't kill those men out of an affection for his dead buddy. He wasn't moved by vengeance. Soldiers don't require revenge. They need only relief from fear. That relief has resulted in some wonderful massacres.

"Now, Smitty," I said, "I know you've had all kinds of experience twisting the necks of chickens, butchering hogs, shooting quail. You can't be blamed if you were brought up a butcher. But listen, friend, some distinctions have to be made. We can't have you slaughtering men like they were animals raised for market. That bothers me."

He asked me what I was getting at, sincerely puzzled. "Well, Smitty, frankly you turn my stomach when you go after prisoners the way you do. I know it's hard to remember that they're human beings. Remember something a little easier. Remember that you're human yourself."

"Christ, Doc, you talking about krauts?" he asked me incredulously. "You mean it troubles you my knocking off krauts?"

"That's the idea, Smitty."

"I'm surprised at you, Doc, you got any feelings for people like that."

"I know your instincts are right, Smitty. But you're getting the habit of murder, friend. You can't take habits like that back to the States."

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Smitty explained, with much resentment, that he was as law-abiding as the next. He was a good citizen and he'd never done any harm to an American. These were krauts, not Americans.

There was this much to his argument. A dead German didn't seem as imposing as a dead GI. Not by any means. He could only die incoherently. The GI wore a field jacket like ours, carried weapons similar to our own, wore boots he'd gotten from a commissary at an induction center, and it wasn't impossible imagining oneself in those boots. But the German wore a helmet like the back of a horseshoe crab. He wore an ill-fitted green overcoat and carried a Mauser rifle. His uniform was different, his equipment was different; in fact, the habit of a dead German was as alien to our mortality as the pelt of a dead animal. Dead GIs could be identified by their uniforms as once having had the same possibilities as live GIs. They were far more suggestive of one's personal mortality.

We rooted an SS sergeant from a forest, a huge, blond, arrogant man. He was handsome and unyielding. A patrol had caught him while he was squatting over a ditch with his pants down. Otherwise, he assured me—I was the only man in the platoon with a small knowledge of German—he'd never have been taken. We were on the march to a village and couldn't send him back. The lieutenant decided to take him along with us. The lieutenant didn't like the boastful German. The fellow stood calmly, his hands on his hips, his weight resting on one leg. "Stand up, you sonofabitch!" he roared. The SS sergeant grinned. *"Nicht Verstehe!"*

"Achtung!" He let his hands drop and grinned so insolently I thought the lieutenant would hand him his death warrant on the spot. The lieutenant stared at him. They considered each other for several seconds. "Okay," the lieutenant said. "Smitty, I want you to keep your eye on this smart alec kraut. If he gives you any trouble, Smitty, well, I'll be at the head of the column, and I don't want you lagging. I don't want you to let this kraut sonofabitch hold us up. You understand?"

Murder was authorized and Smitty loved it. He jabbed the muzzle of his rifle into the kraut's back and motioned him to the end of the column. The kraut grinned at Smitty. *"Brav soldat,"* he said.

"What did the guy say?" Smitty asked me.

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"He said this is a rotten day for him."

"Maybe he don't yet realize." Smitty poked the kraut with the muzzle of his rifle, forcing him to stumble. The kraut glared. *"Willst sterben?"* I asked him. *"Er ist ernst."*

"Bist Jude?" he asked, sneering.

"What did he say? What's he got that krauty grin on for? Tell him I'm going to kill him, Medic. *Tod!"* He snarled at the German. "I'll make you *tod,* you sonofabitch."

At the moment I wanted Smitty to kill him. He begged to die. And being SS, he'd earned his death. And remaining arrogant, he deserved a hard death. And I could have been his executioner myself. Yes, I'd club him with a rifle butt and when he tried to fend me off, Smitty would club him from in back. And when he fell I'd stamp the butt in his face and grind away that smile and see terror and respect for death replace it. But my anger fails when I let my imagination carry it to its fruition. And imagining that terror and the crushed face I was no longer troubled by the insolent smile.

I whispered to him to be careful or Smitty would kill him. I told him that Smitty was a madman.

"Hunde," he snarled. *"Schwein."* He spat at my feet. Well, he was a dead man. When he saw Smitty come after him, crouched over his rifle, his eyes lighted, moving him past the platoon, toward the forest, he knew that he was dead.

"Alright, you dead kraut," Smitty said, sweat rolling from under his spectacles. "Move, move. You're dead, fellow." The German was almost twice the size of Smitty and a hard, powerful man. But he was suddenly alarmed, glanced at me, stumbled, had to hurry to keep ahead of Smitty's rifle. He went backwards into the forest. He stumbled as they entered and Smitty leaped after him. There was no shot. But Smitty came out alone.

"I hope he learned you, Doc. I hope you get the idea now. You want guys like us to get knocked off and him to stay alive?" The plate of his rifle butt was clotted with hair and skin and blood.

We came to a pretty little town, tucked in a crease in a forest. A cobbled street wandered between farmyards that were encompassed by dwellings and stables. There were little stores behind thick plaster fronts with narrow windows. The inhabitants were old folks and women and children. There was a small clothing factory in the

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center of town. The residence of the factory owner occupied the grounds alongside this factory. It was a fine house, humped all over with gables and with a steeple in front. The supporting beams were painted black and the rest of the construction was whitewashed plaster. A three story mansion that would have been fit for a suburban millionaire back in the States. Set in a fine garden, the place looked like home. The lieutenant, of course, selected the house as the billet for our platoon CP. He told us that we might stay in this town for several days. There was some talk of the Russians being close at hand. In fact, from the edge of the town we could see the chimneys of Chemnitz, a sizeable city that would have been a treasure to loot. Chemnitz was reserved for the Russians.

The factory owner was an old man—so his daughter told us—and wasn't fit to negotiate for their place. She was to represent him. She was an educated girl, spoke decent English. "Honey," the lieutenant told her, "the negotiations are all over. We finished negotiating. I'll see that your belongings aren't disturbed. You can take what stuff you need after my boys check you out. But don't trouble yourself with negotiations."

She asked about the factory. She said many workers in town were dependent on their employment.

"Well," he said sweetly—she was clean, a little stout, but had fine manners and much courage—"I guess your people are going to have to wait on the war. You see, we're some of us unemployed ourselves. And right now we got to be a little selfish. You'd understand about that, wouldn't you, honey?"

She stuck right with it, even though the lieutenant had the power to be nasty and was inclined to be. She said that the lieutenant couldn't let the people starve. And what were they to do if the factory shut down?

"Starve, I suppose. It might be a little hard on you krauts. You had a real tough war. But suppose you starve a little longer and get a good feel for the thing." Lt. Blue was a burly, ruddy man. He had become very irritable, even though he had once been a genial grocer from Marion, Ohio.

"You cannot tell people to starve, lieutenant."

"I'll tell you what you goddam krauts can do!" the lieutenant yelled. And he gave her the obscene directions. "You look at these slave laborers you got on your farms. We already seen them. One

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Russian woman come up to me and she tells me her baby died because the farmer she worked for wouldn't give her any milk. I'm going to see to it you people do a little starving. Just to make sure, I don't want you taking any food out of that house. Understand? Take your clothes. Take your silver. But no food. And you come up to me again and try negotiating I'm going to make it clear to you that you are a kraut woman."

She had nerve alright. We were all watching her and she kept her chin up, her eyes level, and went right ahead. She told the lieutenant not to believe everything he heard from those people. They were naturally filled with hate. Not everything they said was true. There were some among her countrymen who were not good people, she couldn't deny that. But were they all to be punished for a few?

The lieutenant had been a grocer and had never been proficient in debate. He couldn't tolerate a German woman arguing with him and he ordered her out. She left, but didn't withdraw like a vanquished enemy.

"I'm gonna see that woman learns some respect," Smitty muttered, following her every stride as she departed. "I'll see you later, kraut woman," he told her. The contempt she directed toward him made me shiver. I could see resolution settle on Smitty. So did the lieutenant.

"Now get this, boys. German men are one thing. I want you to lay off their women. If they're agreeable, that's a different matter. But I don't want any rough stuff. Hear? We're responsible for this town. There's no war in this town. I want this town to be in the same shape when we leave that it's in today. You understand? Is that clear? Smitty?"

"That's alright with me, lieutenant," he said.

The next morning I observed the German girl—her name was Margaret—address the factory workers in the yard. There were about thirty employees, mostly women, a handful of old men. Civilian men had to be old. The Germans had been recruiting antiques for their army. Whole companies of men older than my father were captured and herded to the rear—confused, anxious old guys who undoubtedly had cheered the Fatherland from the sidelines but were too ancient to maintain their fervor after a twenty mile forced retreat on foot.

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I could see that Margaret was real nobility. The workers deferred to her. She was stocky, but graceful. She had a large face, carved clean from teutonic marble. I attributed her calm to ignorance. She didn't know that her potential murderer was in her bed, sunk deep in the feathers which he'd already soiled with his GI boots. Her lace pillow slip already bore the grime from Smitty's neck. Smitty required very little in the way of comfort. The itch of his long johns had been with him for months and he accepted it as a natural condition. In the next day or two we indulged the luxury of bathing. But until then we were most uncouth.

Margaret came up to me. She wore a long-sleeved polka dot dress with a billowing skirt that left an unhindered view of her fine legs. "I'm afraid your officer does not understand," she said to me. "Our factory has not been closed throughout the war. What am I to do with my people? You must permit me to have my engineers take care of the machinery. And you must also forbid your men to enter the factory. This we cannot allow."

"Look, Maggie. Let me give you some advice you badly need. Don't talk of allowing and forbidding. Please. I tell you this for your own good. The best thing you could do is stay out of sight. Vanish. In a few days we'll leave and the military government will take over and you can talk like that to them. But right now there isn't any law. And most of us are low on Germans. You're tempting our boys something awful. It's not to your advantage."

"There is no law? We hear from your radio that the American soldier will treat us properly. That is what your own radio has said. Our people have welcomed you. We regarded you as our liberators. The Russians, yes. They are barbarians. We expect better of the Americans."

"Maggie, anything you get short of death is just pure gravy."

"Was? Nicht verstehe."

"Well, if you don't, then it's impossible. You're finished. You'd better understand. Pretending innocence is just going to get you in trouble. Take my advice. Look guilty. Act like a criminal. Slink away when a GI approaches. Fawn on him. Sleep with him. Cower. Above all, cower. Some of you people are very good at that. You are remarkable cowerers. Our boys are already appreciative. They say you're nicer than the English or the French who have never learned

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the knack of belly-wiggling. Now that's fatal ignorance in a German. Why, you've got a fine belly for wiggling, Maggie. Do me a favor. Do yourself a favor. Wiggle, slink, cower, and disappear."

She calmly considered me. "You are very rude."

Later I saw Smitty watching her. She was moving her clothes into the factory where she had set up quarters.

"Smitty, you don't want to fool around with that fat babe. She's not your type at all. Get yourself a skinny, hungry woman."

"That one got to be taught a few things," he drawled. "She got to learn manners."

"Character is formed in the first seven years of life, Smitty. Afterwards it's hopeless."

Smitty gave me the first cold look he'd ever turned my way. And it was chilling being at the end of a stare that had been directed at murdered men. "Doc, you been givin' me a awful lot of sermons. Why, Doc? What you find so special about me? Is there somethin' about me doesn't strike your fancy?"

"Smitty, you're one of my favorite people. I just want to show you the ropes."

"You been doin' nothin' but followin' me around complaining. How come you always stick up for the krauts? What's it to you how I am with krauts? How come you make it your business?"

"I'm just interested in learning from you, Smitty. Trying to figure you out, buddy."

He was appeased, but a little suspicious. He told me that he liked me, that I had always come through. "But why don't you speak plain, Doc? You tryin' to confuse me?"

I attributed my obscurity to my college training. He slapped me on the back. "You're a good guy, Doc. You're my boy."

It was a little embarrassing being on such good terms with a murderer. But better on good terms than bad. Well, I'd warned the girl. If she persisted in tempting Smitty, I'd have to write her off. That wouldn't disturb my stomach greatly. It would be another load of guilt I'd have to dump when I reached my dumping grounds.

The nature of women is to be single-minded. A man with so narrow a view would be diagnosed as a case of tunnel vision. In the landscape of corpses, of Germans driven in herds to barbed wired encampments, a landscape dominated by rough aliens, Margaret could only see the world as a setting for her factory. She worried

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at obstacles, as tenacious as an ant confronted with an impossibility. She asked the lieutenant whether he would lend one of our vehicles for transporting textiles. "Our cloth comes from Chemnitz. But we cannot go through your lines. And the trains do not run." There were a good many other things that didn't run.

The lieutenant cursed her ignorance. He sketched out the war in graphic idiom. The krauts were making soap out of the world. Germany was a giant factory that rendered men into commercial products. "A man doesn't sell. But when he's soap, that's a product you can buy. I know your goddam kraut minds. Just keep the old factory going. Well, there's not going to be any factory going in Gelbe while I'm boss. You just sit on your tail and wait. Don't come around me."

"I do not make soap, lieutenant. Only clothes."

"You're not making a goddam thing. Period. Get that straight."

She disdained him as an idiot unable to grasp elementary fact. "Our factory has been here before you came. It will be here when you are gone. We are not soldiers. We have nothing to do with the war. We make clothes."

Smitty found her sneaking a ham from the cellar. She had wrapped it in a skirt, disguised as a bundle of clothes. He jerked the bundle from her hands, unfurled the skirt, and rolled the ham on the ground. He kicked it into the garden that surrounded the yard. He held his rifle at his hip, aimed it at her, clicked off the safety. "I got every right to kill you for that, lady. I got every right to kill you for sneaking across our lines. You tell me why I shouldn't kill you? I've heard you talk. I know you're a smart lady and you speak English and you got snooty manners. You're no better than a million others who been killed. I don't like you and I'd like to kill you and I got reason."

She glanced quickly at the ham, nested like a boulder among a clump of tomato plants. She had a contemptuous way of frank inspection before she addressed anyone. I suppose that came from being the boss. "Is it also an American practice to kill unarmed women? Is it all lies what we have been told about the gallantry of the American soldier? Then I have made a mistake. And for that mistake I will die. Shoot me then, Mr. American," she suggested, amused.

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"You sure did hear wrong about us. I never learned nothin' about gallantry. Not to krauts. I learned the deader they are the better they are."

"It was my understanding that soldiers did not shoot women. I had heard that even the barbarians had other uses for women. Even those soldiers without gallantry understood a woman served better purposes than as a target."

Smitty scowled. He didn't understand her.

"What are you good for?"

She smiled. "I'm not even worth that little bullet you would expend on me. To you, I have no value."

"You ain't worth a goddam thing. That's right." He clicked on the safety and slung the rifle over his shoulder.

"To you I am worth nothing. I understand. You come here. You stay a little while. Then you will be gone. Gelbe will remain Gelbe, a place whose name is probably still unfamiliar to you. I am a little tickle of your memory, a face you can barely recall. And I shall never forget you, Mr. American. I shall never forget your generosity. I shall never forget your gallantry."

"Plenty others ain't alive to remember anything," he said. "You're one of the lucky ones, lady. Just don't give me any more temptation."

Smitty did an about face and left her. She openly indicated her contempt of me. She knew I wasn't to be feared. She walked over to the tomatoes and plucked out her ham. She nodded to me, as if greeting a menial, and went out the gate to the factory.

Smitty was troubled.

"What do you make of that kraut, Doc?"

"A spoiled woman," I said. "Rich man's daughter. She's just not your type, Smitty. She has nothing for you."

"She's a kraut." He pronounced the word viciously. "I don't give a damn about her being rich. She's not rich or nothing else as far as I'm concerned. She's not even a woman. She's a lousy kraut."

"That's true, Smitty. But she isn't aware of it."

"She'll learn alright. I'll teach her exactly what she is. She ain't going to be snotty with me. A kraut!"

And Smitty hunted the occasions to give her instruction. When

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she addressed her employees in the factory yard, he shouldered them aside, glared at her, told her he didn't want any crowds gathering that close to our CP. He told her that kraut talk grated on his ear, made him nervous, made his rifle itchy. He was used to pulling triggers when he heard kraut talk. He turned to the workers and told them to scram. "*Heraus!* Beat it. Get the hell out of here." He waved his arms at them like they were crows he wanted to rout from the garden. Margaret gave him her special smile and I saw how hungry Smitty's rifle was.

He was in a morose condition, drunk, one night, when he suddenly arose from the bed and announced to me that he was going to fix her. He took his rifle with him.

"Smitty, she isn't worth it. Don't let that fool screw you up."

He gave me a look so fierce that I didn't try to stop him. The lieutenant had gone to the neighboring town where the company headquarters were located. The platoon sergeant was with him. Sgt. Whitney was in charge. He was an easy-going, indefinite man and no more capable of dealing with Smitty than I. We went out into the yard, but Smitty was already gone. We asked the GI on guard duty which direction he'd taken. He nodded toward the factory. "You ain't supposed to let anyone go there," Whitney told him. "You know that's off limits."

"You try stopping him, Sarge."

Whitney thought the best policy would be to return to the house and wait until someone complained.

"Look, Whitney. If she's dead, she won't complain."

"He ain't going to kill her. Naw. She can take care of herself. She's not alone there. We don't know that he actually went into the factory anyhow. The guard only said he went in that direction."

"It's none of my affair," I told him. "You're in charge."

"Smitty's not going to do nothing," he said hopefully. We were both worried and waited for a scream, a shot, or Smitty's return.

Smitty returned with his rifle dragging. His face was scratched, and he greeted us with a twisted sneer. I thought, "Murder has been done." I even looked at the butt plate of his rifle.

"Give me a pro, Medic," he ordered.

It didn't seem to me plausible that Margaret had slept with Smitty. Men have asked me for pros who haven't touched a woman.

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It's a neat way of putting a false claim into circulation. A woman as gutty as Margaret couldn't be forced to submit to hillbilly lust. I wasn't pleased with the picture of Smitty bedded up with Margaret. I think all men are offended by a vulgar brute making love to a woman with class. But it seemed incredible that Margaret had yielded—even to force.

And when I saw her the next day I was sure that she hadn't. There was no change in her demeanor. She was as calmly intent on re-establishing her rights as she had previously been. She supervised the assembly of a portable generator she'd managed to loot from God knows where. She ignored Smitty's leering. He squatted on the stairs of the garden entrance and watched her every move.

But that night Smitty arose again. He didn't bother indicating where he was headed. He put on his field jacket, stuffed two packs of cigarettes in his pocket, and left without his rifle. And he'd bathed. Again on his return he asked for a pro.

Now Smitty was not a fastidious person. He distained to defend himself against venereal disease. He was unable to regard a woman as a source of contagion—only as a source of pleasure. Obviously, he intended the pro treatment as an announcement of his triumph. The following nights, Smitty followed the same routine, always taking with him some GI goody, like chocolate, bars of soap, or cigarettes. He bathed more frequently than he had in several years of Louisiana living. His routine differed from that of the initial nights in that he no longer demanded a pro. And I observed that while he continued watching Margaret, he no longer leered. I noticed one night that Smitty returned bearing an empty gasoline cannister. That was a much stronger bribe than chocolate bars or cigarettes.

"You know," I told him, "that Margaret isn't a bad dame. I kind of like her. If you gave her a break, Smitty, I think you could get to like her, too. Why don't you take it easy, buddy? You'll find she's human."

He was suspicious. "She's alright," he conceded.

"For a kraut, that is. We mustn't forget she's a kraut."

He shrugged.

"Don't forget, Smitty, that her eyes weren't closed the entire time when slave labor ran this town. You've seen the DPs and heard their stories. She's not bad, given that she's a kraut."

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"I ain't sheddin' no tears over any goddam DPs. A bunch of dirty cattle," he muttered.

And I began to believe that something had happened those nights—and was happening.

After two weeks' residence in Gelbe it had become clear that the war had petered out. The approach of the Russians was imminent. Their arrival was heralded by the growing flocks of human refuse they had uprooted and liberated. French and English prisoners of war, most of them in desperate condition, crossed our lines and were shunted to the rear. Cadaverous men in striped uniforms came to us from concentration camps the Germans had abandoned. The bulk of the exodus, however, was constituted by German civilians who had loaded their belongings on carts and had not awaited Russian justice. These we refused admission through our lines. We didn't want highways cluttered with Germans whose actual status we couldn't determine. They settled in the open fields between Chemnitz and Gelbe and waited an opportunity to sneak past our guards. They begged our sympathy with harrowing tales of Russian vengeance. We were not sympathetic—nor were the townsfolk of Gelbe. They were concerned with their own ambiguous situation, located as they were on the border of the Russian surge.

Despite the rootlessness of German living, Margaret prospered. She had somewhere secured German vehicles. And she had somewhere secured fuel. And during the second week of our occupation the factory had resumed operating.

I saw her in the yard supervising the transport of cloth and the loading of the finished material. Dressed always as a well-born young woman, she marshalled her employees with the assurance of a general. She less frequently required the lieutenant's assistance. And during the day, there was little evidence that Smitty was her collaborator. But concerning this I no longer had doubts. I saw him one night bring in a jeepload of gasoline which her employees unloaded. When they had gone, Smitty lunged at her and wrestled her against the jeep. For a moment she held him off with an ease that made his conquest seem improbable. But he continued pressing and suddenly she caved and I saw him dig his face into her throat. I could hear their panting from the doorway. They pulled each other into the factory.

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I came upon her after she had routed her employees to a dozen different tasks and was alone for a moment. She stood in the factory yard, her hands on her hips, her legs spread apart, studying her accomplishment. The gratification in that slight, controlled smile would have sat well on General Patton.

I complimented her and she nodded without troubling to consider me.

"Yes, Maggie, the generations applaud. How lucky you weren't a man. The story of the war would have been written differently."

"The war is finished," she answered coldly.

"Yes. It's finished. And you pluck through the debris and find manageable tools. And what would those proud burghers have thought of your method, Maggie? They'd have approved that, too, I suppose. It's after all a stroke of luck that you're a woman and can even make an instrumentality of bed."

She shrugged. "You are a fool."

"Is that any way to talk to the conqueror?"

"You are no conqueror."

"Perhaps not, Maggie." I was annoyed that I had no power to disturb this woman. "I suppose to be the conqueror you must have the power to do harm. And I'm no killer."

"You are a talker," she said contemptuously.

"Doesn't Smitty ever talk? Doesn't he even mutter in his sleep?"

"Sleep." She shrugged again, not bothering to remove her hands from her hips, merely a decisive shoulder wiggle. "It is very easy to sleep. You people do not know how to be awake. For a little sleep, you will lose your power. I do not sleep, Herr Doctor. I am wide awake."

"But you can sing lullabies to murderers, can't you? Tell me, Maggie, what will happen when the Russians come? Can they be civilized, too, by a little sleep?"

"I have the American. I am not concerned with the Russian."

There were adequate reasons for despising her. She had turned the war on its ear. She had made it seem a base enterprise, to be controlled by an easy manipulation of elemental desires. But I had to respect her self-possession amid chaos.

And how about Smitty, who had lost his integrity as a murderer? Is homicide so shaky an enterprise it fails at the first touch

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of love? He was as much her tool as if he had been married to her. And a few days before he'd greeted Germans with rifle butts.

"What are you going to do with her, Smitty?" I asked. "She isn't loot you can send home through the mails. She's no trophy of war."

But Smitty wanted no discussion of his situation. He had fierce eyes for my inquiry. But I pressed it. "How do you know, Smitty, that you didn't knock off some of her relatives? Maggie isn't the type to forgive that. You got debts to pay off."

"I'll tell you straight, Doc," he warned me. "I don't give a damn what it's ever been between me and anybody else. That goes for you and the rest of the guys. And it goes for dead krauts. What I got with her is my private business."

"Could you kill her if you had to, Smitty?"

"I warn you to lay off, Doc. I don't want no trouble."

"Suppose she's a spy, Smitty. Could you stamp her out with your rifle butt? Is she so special?"

"Goddam you!" he snarled. "You're damn right she's special. If all Europe was piled in one heap and all the GIs laid out on top, it wouldn't make no difference to me."

"And she makes a difference."

"Goddam you, Doc!" He shook his fist at me. "Yes! She makes a difference. She's the only goddam difference there is."

Well, the killer had a soft spot and she'd reached it.

The boredom of waiting made us tense with expectations of the Russians. The plain between Gelbe and Chemnitz was thick with refugee fires and makeshift tents. The Germans offered all in their power—their bodies, their cameras, their watches, their silver, even their worthless marks—as purchase for their entry into safe territory. But their predicament was too common and universal to disturb us. Bodies were a plentiful commodity. We accepted the loot without regard for payment.

When the Russians came, it was most casually. Two ragged soldiers in baggy tunics, dirty boots, and stained trousers approached our guards, their poorly machined burp guns tucked under their arms. These two grinning men, short, clumsy fellows, with wild hair peaked by overseas caps, embraced our guards enthusiastically. We were not moved. They came to our CP and were offered cognac which they

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downed in a gulp. They were simple fellows and prepared to love us. The Germans darted from them. A German on a bicycle who didn't scurry quickly enough was sent sprawling by a swat from a gun stock. They toasted us in a German too primitive for me to easily understand. When I asked where their troops were, they waved vaguely in the direction from which they had come. They observed the factory and were appreciative. I gathered they relished the loot entrenched there. The lieutenant had me ask them to present their officers. They understood and nodded enthusiastically. *"Amerikanski-Russki-ami!"* they shouted. They did not defer to the lieutenant. They rather ignored him. Within moments after they had arrived they were surrounded by Russians, DPs who had been slave laborers. The women swarmed over the two Russians. They spoke to them, all in a rush. The soldiers grinned and frowned. They nodded. They obviously were making their own plans for our town. The DPs motioned toward the factory, toward the fields. Some of them wept. The soldiers said, *"Da. Da."* They grinned at us but their attention was fixed on our town. A German civilian passed and one of the Russian women spat on him. He scurried.

The taller of the two soldiers told me that the Germans had been hard on his people. He said that his people were upset because the Americans had done nothing to punish their persecutors. He said that now that the Russians had arrived justice would be done.

I informed the lieutenant.

"We don't want no trouble," Lt. Blue said. "We got charge of this town and we can't have the Russkys running all over it. Tell this guy I want to talk to his officer."

When the Russian soldiers left, the lieutenant assembled us. We were informed that under no conditions were we to be provoked into fighting. If there was any difficulty with the Russians we were to come to him.

The Russian officer came in a horse-cart whose driver was a wide-faced stubby woman in a military tunic, wearing a beret. Despite his poor vehicle, he made a grand entrance. He was taller than the two Russians we had previously seen. His uniform was immaculate, high boots with a patent leather shine. He wore braided epaulets. We were none of us familiar with the Russian ranking and didn't know what his grade was. He was a young man, blond,

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slick, very neat. He smoked from a cigarette holder and, though he too was enthusiastic in his greeting, he was poised and calm. His chauffeur had the same grinning peasant sloppiness as the two scouts who had preceded her. She was a handsome woman, constructed like a fullback. The officer bowed slightly and shook hands and delivered an eloquent greeting in Russian, unconcerned that we didn't understand. His manner was that of a host assuring us of his geniality. I spoke to him in my simple German, which he was able to manage.

He told me, speaking to the platoon rather than to me, that this was an occasion for history. He insisted that I shake hands with him, then made the rounds of the soldiers, bowing slightly, not extending any special recognition to Lt. Blue.

"Tell him we've been waiting a long time for this," the lieutenant instructed me.

He answered that we could now get down to the business of setting the world straight. He said that first we must insure the peace by forever depriving the German of his power to wage war. He said that his people had learned all about the Germans through hard experience and knew how to manage them. Now that the war was over, justice could be done. His people had suffered much.

The lieutenant had me tell the Russian that our men had been instructed not to cross the Russian lines. The orders we had received from division required us to man the demarcation line between Chemnitz and Gelbe jointly with the Russians.

The Russian officer listened, smiled, answered that for his part he would welcome our soldiers to his camp. He understood, however, that we were under orders. And he had received the same orders. He said that his men had much hatred for the Germans and that it was not easy to restrain their justifiable desire for vengeance.

His eyes took in our town and narrowed at the sight of the factory.

We drank cognac with each other, exchanged toasts. He called sharply to his chauffeur, mounted the cart, crossed his legs. She reached over and swatted the horse with the flat of her hand, a sharp sound, and the horse lurched. The Russian waved back to us.

"That's a cool customer," the lieutenant commented with obvious dislike. "Those people sure don't give a damn for protocol. Who

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the hell is he anyway? For all I know, he's a general."

"He wants trouble," Smitty said.

"Well, we don't. Trouble is the last thing we want. So don't you and your kraut woman get any ideas. Understand, Smitty?"

This was the first indication that the lieutenant was at all familiar with Smitty's extra-military preoccupation. Smitty flushed.

Margaret had observed the Russian officer's visit. She had come into the factory yard just as he departed. And he had turned in his high seat and studied her, aloof, bouncing in the cart, but still comfortably situated around his cigarette holder. She watched him go, her hands on her hips. Smitty and I walked up to her.

"He owns the world, such a man," she said bitterly.

"He don't own a damn thing," Smitty said.

"Ach! You are innocent of Russians. You know nothing of Russians. You Americans are like a match, a small flame, then pfft. The Russians are a conflagration. You think with the Russians I could keep my factory?"

"Don't you worry about them, baby," Smitty advised. "You ain't going to have no dealings with them. And none of them are going to give you any trouble. None of them better."

"Are you going to throw yourself in front of the flood like you are a dam? Hah! You would be washed away."

"I can take care of myself. And I can take care of any man tries to get in my way."

"Yes, Maggie," I told her, "I think you could keep your factory even with the Russians pulling at the foundations."

"Maybe," she said. "Maybe not. It would be difficult. It would perhaps be too difficult. It would be dangerous, I think."

"There ain't going to be no Russians."

"Will you defend me, my American?" she mocked.

"You just let me know if any of them ever tries bothering you."

Well, love had made a soft spot in Smitty but the rest of him was as hard as ever. His violence wasn't deeply corrupted. And the way he considered the stray Russians who came through our lines, you could see that he'd jumbled them all together, made them into a heap, a pile of strangers. And Margaret stroked his homicide till it was strong and resolute and hard. Her professed fear of the Russians made him wild. Her forebodings of what they might do to her made him itch to prove himself. The lieutenant warned him several

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times. But he had a different mentor. And she had sharpened him till he had a fine cutting edge. Margaret wasn't afraid of Russians or anything else. She wanted to be armed, and Smitty was a weapon that was handy.

Two Russian soldiers came in a cart. They were both little men. Few of their soldiers were tall. They were dressed in ankle-length overcoats and peaked caps and high boots. One of them, wearing chevrons of some kind—I presumed him to be a sergeant—jumped nimbly from the cart and entered the factory yard. We arose from the garden stairs to observe what he was after. He walked over to a Volkswagon that was being loaded with cloth. He elbowed the Germans aside and studied the machine. He kicked the tires. Then he shouted a command to the Germans. They began emptying the car. He shouted at another of the workers. The fellow protested. The Russian cracked him across the side of the face with the flat of his hand. The German scurried into the factory. The Russian climbed into the car and waited.

"That sonofabitch," Smitty muttered. And I could hear again the tone of murder, that same resentment that had ended in the death of German captives. He was on his way. Whitney ran for the lieutenant. I followed Smitty.

"You want something, you bastard?" Smitty asked the Russian.

The Russian grinned at him, waved. He needed a car, he said. I interpreted for Smitty.

"Tell him to get out of there or he's dead." The Russian noticed Smitty fingering the trigger of his rifle. He frowned. He asked what bothered Smitty? I suggested he wait for our lieutenant who would be glad to take care of his needs. I told him that it might make things difficult for us if he were simply to take the vehicle. His companion came over and stood alongside the Volkswagon, warily observing Smitty, his burp gun held ready.

"Officers," the sergeant grinned. "I do not like to talk to officers. Your officers cannot speak to a plain soldier. You and me, we shall settle this thing. Yes?"

I told him that I thought he deserved the car. And I hoped that he would be able to keep it.

He grinned. "I think, yes. I think there is no question. I have no auto. The German has an auto." He spread out his hands to indicate that the solution was obvious.

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"What's he say?"

I told Smitty. I saw the lieutenant run out the side door. Smitty took a step toward the Volkswagon, and the other Russian made a move with his burp gun. Smitty whirled and caught him on the side of the face with the rifle stock and knocked him flat. He shoved the rifle into the sergeant's face. *"Heraus!"*

"Put that gun down, Smitty!" the lieutenant bellowed. "Drop it. You hear me, you dumb screwball!" He ran up and pulled the rifle away from Smitty. "Now get into the CP and wait till I come for you. On the double!"

The sergeant climbed out of the Volkswagon. He glared sullenly at the lieutenant. The lieutenant apologized. The Russian answered harshly in his native tongue. I helped him raise his comrade. He shook me off and lifted the man easily. He was surprizingly strong for so little a man. He hoisted his comrade into the cart. He shouted back at us and smacked the horses with his reins.

"That's just great," the lieutenant said. "I knew that dumb hillbilly was going to make trouble."

But Smitty was not in the mood to be threatened by rank. The passivity of the rear echelons to Russian offensiveness was intolerable to his trigger finger, which knew the simplicity of justice. That baggy little Russian, claiming the privileges of our town, usurping the domain we had conquered, was someone to be wiped out. He meant, wiped out. Squashed, then smothered in a rag, then dumped in the refuse pile where other corpses were heaped. "No, I ain't going to apologize!" he raged at the lieutenant. "I ain't going to bend down to garbage. I don't care about no court-martial. He don't belong here and he ain't going to come into our town, right up to our CP, and take whatever he fancies. You can lock me up for it, lieutenant, but you won't make me apologize."

The lieutenant was too sympathetic to maintain his indignation. He told Smitty he shared his feelings. "But you put me in a rough position, Smitty. What am I supposed to do if his officer complains? I got my orders. I told you before—I told you about the krauts and I told you about the reds—we got nothing to do with justice. That isn't our line."

"You do what you got to, lieutenant." Smitty sat on the bed of his sweetheart with his fists clenched. His eyes bulged behind his spectacles. "I don't care. You got to court-martial me, go ahead. I

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just warn you, lieutenant, I'm going to kill me a Russian if they come to our town again."

"Goddamit! It isn't our town! It's your girl friend's town. I don't give a damn what happens to this town. Another week and we'll be out of here. We'll never see this town again. They can erase this town from all the maps in the world and it won't bother me."

"What do you mean we're getting out?"

"Yes, We're getting out. This is Russian territory. We're moving back to Zwickau. In another week that little Russky sergeant will have the run of this place."

"We're giving the town to the Russians?"

"I'm giving nothing to nobody. There isn't one inch of Europe, one handful of Europe, I want to have. The Russians can have the whole goddam mess so far as I'm concerned."

"They're taking over the town? Like Margaret said?"

"How the hell did she know?"

"And you ain't even telling the people?"

"That's right. And you ain't telling them either, Smitty. Understand? They're not to know. We don't want them moving back with us. We got enough refugees to handle."

"You're going to leave them here for the Russians? You know what the Russians are going to do to them? You hear the way these DPs been talking?"

"Let them talk. They got a right to talk. Let the krauts have a little of their own medicine. You wanted justice? Well, that's your justice. And you're going to shut up about it. You're confined to quarters, understand? I don't want you out of this room. Tomorrow I'm sending you back to battalion. I'll send you under guard if I have to. By God, Smitty, you're going to pay some attention to orders if I have to detail a squad to make you."

"I got your orders. I heard you." Smitty settled back. But both the lieutenant and I could see he was resolved on a course of action that had little to do with the orders he'd been given.

"You're confined to quarters. Understand?" He glared at Smitty whose eyes were sternly fixed on the door. "Do you get me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to watch him, Doc. If he so much as goes to the john without my permission, I want to hear."

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But Smitty put on his field jacket and made for the side exit when the lieutenant left.

"I'm not worried about you," he told me.

I followed him out. Margaret was at the factory gate, watching his coming. Her hands were on her hips and her feet spread, planted solid as a buttress. He grabbed her arm and put his face to hers, his body tensed with pleading. I didn't hear what he said, nor did I hear her response. But I saw him twitch his length like he was a strummed bow. He grabbed her other arm and tried to pull her from her roots. She was stronger than he and gave him a full, unflinching regard in accompaniment to her speech. She looked like a boss discharging an employee. When I reached them, he was wild. He emptied himself of all the abuse he'd mastered in his three years as a GI.

"I owe you nothing," I heard her say. "I did not ask for you. They lock you up like a naughty boy when you are mean to the Russians."

We caught him as he leaped on her. He foamed at her and it required four of us to drag him away. She wasn't frightened.

The Russian officer came again. This time he arrived at our CP in a German command car, chauffeured by a professional, a Russian in tanker dress and a lumpy hard face.

"My man was attacked," the Russian said calmly. He lighted a cigarette that was thrust into the holder. He surveyed our ranks indifferently. "Is this the way you greet friends?"

"Tell him his men had no right being here," the lieutenant ordered.

The officer shrugged. "And for this you club my man with a rifle? That man you struck had his family destroyed by Germans. He has been fighting for five years. When you Americans were still enjoying the comforts of peace, he was at war. He is an impatient man. He has much to settle with the Germans. Impatience is a small crime. In another week justice will be done." He stared insolently at the lieutenant, who flushed. "It is not good for the future that you are not concerned with justice." "*Recht*" he said in German.

"I'm only a soldier. Tell him that. I obey my superiors. He's under the same orders. Tell him the man who struck his soldier will be punished. Tell him I've made a full report to our command.

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Tell him we regret the incident. I apologize, tell him. We all apologize. We're sorry it happened. We're crazy about the Russkys. Tell him that."

Despite my inadequate telling the two officers glared their dislike. The Russian bowed, again that mocking salute. He summoned his chauffeur harshly, pointed to the car.

"This is a pretty village," he said with a smile, glancing at the factory.

Margaret stood at the gate. She carried a bouquet of flowers. I had seen her pluck them from the garden earlier. And when the command car stopped at the gate, prepared to surge around the turn, she approached it in full view of us. She walked over to the Russian, not smiling, but offered her tribute as a simple acknowledgment of the facts of life. She spoke to the officer, extended the bouquet. He leaned from the vehicle, took it from her, smiled. As the car pressed forward, he threw the bouquet into the mud—not a violent gesture, a casual, indifferent one. He didn't glance back to see the effect of the insult.

"She isn't going to sweeten her justice with flowers," the lieutenant said. "She'll get it hard, I won't cry for her."

But Margaret remained at the gate, staring toward the vanished Russians. Smitty screamed murder from the bedroom window.

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POEMS

THE PURE FURY

I

Stupor of knowledge lacking inwardness—
What book, O learned man, will set me right?
Once I read nothing through a fearful night,
For every meaning had grown meaningless.
Morning, I saw the world with second sight,
As if all things had died, and rose again.
I touched the stones: they had my own rough skin.

II

The pure admire the pure, and live alone;
I love a woman with an empty face.
Parmenides put Nothingness in place;
She tries to think, and it flies loose again.
How slow the changes of a golden mean:
Great Boehme rooted all in Yes and No;
At times my darling squeaks in pure Plato.

III

How terrible the need for solitude:
That appetite for life so ravenous
A man's a beast prowling in his own house,
A beast with fangs, and out for his own blood
Until he finds the thing he almost was
When the pure fury first raged in his head
And trees came closer with a denser shade.

IV

Dream of a woman, and a dream of death:
The light air takes my being's breath away;
I look on white, and it turns into gray—

When will that creature give me back my breath?
I live near the abyss; I hope to stay
Until my eyes look at a brighter sun
As the thick shade of the long night comes on.

Theodore Roethke

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LAMENTATION OF A BROKEN SILHOUETTE

The nape of my neck is crusted with sugar like clinker;
But no one tastes or even sees it which
Is because from in front it's invisible,
From side and back it has a changing shape.
This chill-wind world cuts my shape into lines
So quite devoid of meaning, so shortest-distance
Between two vanishing points I do not wonder
No one takes my sugar when I bow.
Warm in the crook of an embracing elbow
My neck is round at last but alas!
The rest of me falls away and I can't find it.
At any given moment what I can gather
Together I give to you. I quite understand
The *malentendu* and malice my pieces provoke.
I will even try to accept what love is going
For bits I bring that do not belong to me.

BEGGAR AT THE VILLA D'ESTE

No legs. I must sit still.
People pass who are,
More or less, amused at falling waters.
Treasures of this hill.
He was rich. I'm poor,
But share his pleasures.
I shan't risk my virtue for Perhaps,
When here expensive fancies are secure.
"It's obsessive—the fountains—the whole idea"
That posh-faced tourist says.
I have to laugh
At fear afraid of fear.

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"Then you love water you mean?
The more fool you" I say,
(He's much too tall to hear).
I was born near Lake Trasimene.
Nearly every evening that expanse
Of land-turned-liquid
Turns to grey to green,
Flamingo to bloody carmine.
There's no sense
In frightening one like that!
In all those colors, reeds like dead mens' fingers
Break the silences and mirrors.
I tell you there's no laughing on those banks,
On any beach or shore or not for long.
You get to think, Say prayers even.
Ugh! It cares a lot for you! No thanks!
But here's a prince, a cardinal, fly as they come,
By tricks and cheats puts water in his purse.
Makes something you can drown in, something cruel,
Dance in front of him like a hired fool.
Then you forget you have no legs. That's art.
Made him, they say, forget he had no heart.
And yet his house is damp . . . And yet it's grand! . . .
If I could walk I'd go
As far from water as there is and, oh!
If I could fly, as far away from land!

P. J. Kavanagh

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THE ICE HOUSE IN SUMMER

see Amos, 3.15.

A door sunk in a hillside, with a bolt
thick as the boy's arm, and behind that door
the walls of ice, melting a blue, faint light,
an air of cedar branches, sawdust, fern:
decaying seasons keeping from decay.

A summer guest, the boy had never seen
(a servant told him of it) how the lake
froze three foot thick, how farmers came with teams,
with axe and saw, to cut great blocks of ice,
translucent, marbled, glittering in the sun,
load them on sleds and drag them up the hill
to be manhandled down the narrow path
and set in courses for the summer's keeping,
the kitchen uses and luxuriousness
of the great houses. And he heard how once
a team and driver drowned in the break of spring:
the man's cry melting from the ice that summer
frightened the sherbet-eaters off the terrace.

Dust of the cedar, lost and evergreen
among the slowly blunting water walls
where the blade edge melted and the steel saw's bite
was rounded out, and the horse and rider drowned
in the red sea's blood, I was the silly child
who dreamed that riderless cry, and saw the guests
run from a ghostly wall, so long before
the winter house fell with the summer house,
and the houses, Egypt, the great houses, had an end.

Howard Nemerov

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BACCHANAL

The bitch, the bitched, the bugger, the bewildered,
The murderer and the murdered
Form our circle,

Betrayer and betrayed are one.
When each the same has done,
Distinction's gone.

And every day the Judas kiss
Comes easier, while practice
Perfects it.

So I knife him while you knife me,
Embraced in the Conga reel
Of treachery.

Truth and Love, keep far away.
This is not your day,
Nor not fit play

For you. Keep to the high rock ledges.
Down here, a catty knowledge
Of softness spreads

Across the dance, then calls the round.
Its fur pads glance, then pound
The dizzy ground.

What joy to join in that great dancing,
What rebirth in forgetting
Everything

But that, as we drown from individual
Sense to general,
Desire is all.

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Bright Truth, sweet Love, you never helped
So well the terrible surfeit
Of our self.

Katherine Hoskins

A SURVIVAL

I have forgotten how. I try to wake,
I want to. But an eye, when morning comes,
Weeps grains of sand, an ear a bitter wax,
The linen winds and wrinkles like shed skin.

Outside, the angel fumbles with a rake.
He has forgotten, too. And by fall, albums
Are full of studies done in browns and blacks
For one stilled figure, rarely a face drawn in.

Father, your blind hound fleetest where he lies
In the familiar dream of weapon and flight
Stirring, will puzzle at my outstretched palm,

Then let me merge into those images
Whose odors guide, that can no more excite,
His silvering muzzle towards your perfect calm.

THE PERFUME

Ticklish no longer
With tangibility
Nor rooted, crimson, over
The worm's inching stupor,

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Little but a spirit
Costly and volatile
Am I, want of my touch unstoppers
Now that you suffer it.

James Merrill

THE DOPPELGANGER

In that still street where I have never walked
No craze of moonlight frosts the window panes,
No iron gateway whistles in the wind,
No cloth reveals a tale in coffee stains.

I was not there and never closed the doors.
No postman could have found her anywhere
Who could not hear the clash of absent wars.
No spider spins its web beneath the stair.

No footfalls in the hall were ever known,
Not known the measured, breathless, steep ascent;
The moment never came, has never gone.
There was no disappointment, no intent.

No owl was puckered for its night-long note,
No squinty bats performed their drunken race.
By that address there was no one to dote
Upon the moon, my sorrows in his face.

He was not there, and did not curse that house
Or bite his lips, and so he never said:
I live within another consciousness,
Where I am not, I waken from the dead.

Robert Pack

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POEM

In the green morning, before
Love was destiny,
The sun was king,
And God was famous.

The merry, the musical,
The jolly, the magical,
The feast, the feast of feasts, the festival
Suddenly ended
As the sky descended
But there was only the feeling,
In all the dark falling,
Of fragrance and of freshness, of birth and beginning.

Delmore Schwartz

THOUGHT TO CATULLUS

sunburst
of lemon oil and olive
and thin silvergold rays
fine as dove
a swelling globe
of rain
drops sharply
on hot new-turned soil
and a cloud
blue and white and
brimming with itself
rolls heavily slowly
sometimes burning
suncaught

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often colliding
with mountains

your sweating bed
the metamorphosis
of one
sunburst
lemon oil and olive
rain mountain and cloud
one
drop of sweat
sour-sweet as lemon

sentio et excrucior
Catullus

OLD MAN

Now the long boats have gone,
Rain has stolen fire from the earth.

Today tastes of cold and death
And time is salt under my hand.

Lyman Andrews

ODE TO JOY

We shall have everything we want and there'll be no more dying
on the pretty plains or in the supper clubs
for our symbol we'll acknowledge vulgar materialistic laughter
over an insatiable sexual appetite
and the streets will be filled with racing forms
and the photographs of murderers and narcissists and movie stars
will swell from the walls and books alive in steaming rooms

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to press against our burning flesh not once but interminably
as water flows down hill into the full lipped basin
and the adder dives for the ultimate ostrich egg
and the feather cushion preens beneath a reclining monolith
that's sweating with post-exertion visibility and sweetness
near the grave of love

No more dying

We shall see the grave of love as a lovely sight and temporary
near the elm that spells the lovers' names in roots
and there'll be no more music but the ears in lips and no more wit
but tongues in ears and no more drums but ears to thighs
as evening signals nudities unknown to ancestors' imaginations
and the imagination itself will stagger like a tired paramour of ivory
under the sculptural necessities of lust that never falters
like a six-mile runner from Sweden or Liberia covered with gold
as lava flows up and over the far-down somnolent city's abdication
and the hermit always wanting to be lone is lone at last
and the weight of external heat crushes the heat-hating Puritan
who's self-defeating vice becomes a proper sepulchre at last
that love may live

Buildings will go up into the dizzy air as love itself goes in
and up the reeling life that it has chosen for once or all
while in the sky a feeling of intemperate fondness will excite the birds
to swoop and veer like flies crawling across absorbed limbs
that weep a pearly perspiration on the sheets of brief attention
and the hairs dry out that summon anxious declaration of the organs
as they rise like buildings to the needs of temporary neighbors
pouring hunger through the heart to feed desire in intravenous
ways
like the ways of gods with humans in the innocent combination of light
and flesh or as the legends ride their heroes through the dark to found
great cities where all life is possible to maintain as long as time
which wants us to remain for cocktails in a bar and after dinner
lets us live with it

No more dying

Frank O'Hara

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NOTES OF A SCALE

I

A noon with twilight overtones
from open windows looking down.
Hell! it goes by. The trees
practice green in faithful measure.
It could be what I'm waiting for is
not here at all. Yet
the trees have it, don't they?
Absorbed in their own magic,
abundant, hermetic, wide open.

II

The painting within itself,
a boy that has learned to whistle,
a fisherman. The painting
living its magic, admitting
nothing, being, the boy
pushing his hands further into his
pockets, the fisherman
beginning the day, in dew and half-dark,
by a river whose darkness
will be defined as brown in a
half-hour. The painting
suspended in itself, an angler
in the suspense of daybreak,
whistling to itself.

III

Where the noon passes
in camouflage of twilight

doesn't cease to look
into it from his oblique
angle, leafwise,
'. . . maintains dialog with his heart,'

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doesn't spill the beans
balances like a papaya tree on a single
young elephant-leg.

IV

A glass brimming, not spilling,
the green trees
practicing their art.
'A wonder
from the true world,'
he who accomplished it
'overwhelmed with the wonder
which rises out of his doing.'

THE ABSENCE

Here I lie asleep
or maybe I'm awake yet—

not alone—and yet
it seems by moonlight

I'm alone, hardly hearing
a breath beside me. And those shadows

on the wall indeed are
not shadows but the
featherweight dancing echoes
of headlights sliding by.

Here I lie and wonder
what it is has left me, what element.
I can't remember my dreams
by morning.
Maybe, as Frazer tells,

my soul flew out in that moment
of almost-sleep. If it should go

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back to the scenes and times
of its wars and losses

how would I ever lure it
back? It would
be looking for something, it would be
too concentrated to hear me.

O moon, watching everything,
delay it in the garden among the white flowers

until the cold air before sunrise
makes it glad to come back to me through the screens.

Denise Levertov

MOTET

At crack of dawn, at the time
When abruptly with rumbling voice
The railway recalls to me here
The men shut in its trains
In hard tunnelled ground
With the light sliced and flashed
From the waters and the skies;

At crack of dark, at the time
When the graver that scrawls deep
In the desk bites and strains
With a new fury, and the sound
Of the watchman's step draws near:
At dawn and dark, pauses that are human still!
—Patiently thread them together with your eyes.

from *Le Occasioni*

Eugenio Montale

(*Translated from the Italian by Edwin Morgan*)

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INSCRIBED ON A GRAVESTONE, PERHAPS

Here far from everyone the sun beats down
on your caps and rekindles the honey in you,
and already the last cicada of summer
remembers us alive from its shrub,
and the siren that howls its profound
alarm over the Lombard plain.
O burnt voices of the wind, what do you want?
Tedium still rises from the earth.

MAN OF MY TIME

You are still that creature of the stone and sling,
man of my time. You were in the fuselage,
with the malicious wings, the sun-dials of death
—I've seen you—in the flame-throwing tank, on the gallows,
on the rack. I've seen you: you were,
with your exact science bent on extermination,
without love, without Christ. You have killed again
as always, as your fathers killed, as the animals
who saw you for the first time used to kill.
And this blood smells as in the day
when one brother said to the other:
"Let's go into the fields." And that cold, tenacious echo
has come subtly to you within your day.
Forgotten, O sons, the clouds of blood
risen from the earth, forgotten the fathers:
their graves sink in the ashes,
the blackbirds, the wind cover their heart.

Salvatore Quasimodo

(*Translated from the Italian by Charles Guenther*)

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John Kinnaird

THE PARADOX OF AN AMERICAN 'IDENTITY'

The world of Henry James seems an unlikely source for even the slightest analogy to Whitman, yet there is at least one scene in a James novel, in *Roderick Hudson*, that might well be called a Whitmanesque occasion. We forget, perhaps, that as Americans and as near contemporaries Whitman and James had necessary affinities; that originally, as F. W. Dupee reminds us, we find in James, as in Whitman and Melville, the characteristic idealism, the "romantic disposition" of nineteenth-century America. Occurring as it does in his first "international" novel, the scene I have in mind might be said to symbolically mark the beginnings of the young James's divergence from Whitman's America, exactly as it does for the protagonists of his story. Shortly before they sail for Europe, Roderick, a young sculptor, and his friend, Rowland Mallet, are out walking on a beautiful summer's day; they have just flung themselves down on a grassy bank above the Connecticut River, when Rowland suddenly turns to his friend to express a strange feeling of "prospective regret":

"It's a wretched business," he said, "this practical quarrel of ours with our own country, this everlasting impatience to get out of it. Is one's only safety then in flight? This is an American day, an American landscape, an American atmosphere. It certainly has its merits, and some day when I am shivering with ague in classic Italy, I shall accuse myself of having slighted them."

Roderick kindled with a sympathetic glow, and declared that America was good enough for him, and that he had always thought it the duty of an honest citizen to stand by his own country and help it along. . . . The doctrine expanded with the occasion, and he declared that he was above all an advocate for American art. We were the big-

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gest people, and we ought to have the biggest conceptions. The biggest conceptions of course would bring forth in time the biggest performances. We had only to be true to ourselves, to pitch in and not be afraid, to fling Imitation overboard and fix our eyes upon our National Individuality. "I declare," he cried, "there's a career for a man, and I've twenty minds to decide, on the spot, to embrace it—to be the consummate, typical, original, national American Artist! It's inspiring!"

Not only the doctrine but the occasion here is Whitman's: Roderick's inspiration of a moment Whitman might be said to have expanded into a poetic career. Reclining on the grass above the virgin natural vistas of America—this is such an archetypal situation in Whitman that even our advertisers have long since learned to exploit it as a ritualistic *mise en scène* for the evocation of "the American Dream." But a paradoxical irony inheres in all such scenes; and here that irony clearly emerges in the fact that Rowland should make his complaint of "everlasting impatience" ("Is one's only safety then in flight?") and that Roderick should wax rhapsodic about "our National Individuality" from a position which is already, in effect, a personal refuge. Our national society, it seems, is always being affirmed (as in *Cinerama,* for instance) from some great height or distance, from a situation of personal withdrawal and solicitude, eminently free of all social trammels. If, then, we allegorize Whitman here as the enthusiastic Roderick, we must also place the expatriate James by his side as the troubled Rowland: in vastly different ways both men were obsessed, and to some extent enthralled, by the manifold paradox of our American self-consciousness. Certainly no other of our writers have been more obsessively concerned with the 'Americanness' of the American personality. In James that paradox became refined into the multiple ironies of our moral sensibility, while in Whitman it remained the native paradox of democracy—that "sphinx of Democracy" that James let more or less alone. But the riddle of the sphinx is, I believe, the same in both; the truth that each made his own is implicit in the other. For if it was James who knew that no American subjectivity, no matter how seemingly individual and "free," could ever be understood as anything but American—and precisely in its very insistence on its spiritual freedom and innocence; so among all champions of the American Dream it is only Whitman who constantly remembers to represent the condition of that dream—

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the condition, namely, that "America," being a world of selves, has no value or meaning apart from the separate and subjective "I":

> *One's-Self I sing, a simple, separate Person,*
> *Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.*

It was once an unchallenged assumption in our criticism that, unlike James, Whitman had no quarrel or struggle with America—or, rather, that his sole quarrel with America was over its not being American enough. Recent criticism, however, has discovered that the paradox Whitman's thematic inscription represents is in every sense real, to be understood not as a Transcendentalist "idea" derived from Emerson, but as a radical opposition within his sensibility—an agonistic conflict reconciled in the balanced ambiguities of a style that is at all times both a self-dramatization and the imagination of a world. And with this discovery of an enigmatic darkness beneath its benign simplicities, *Leaves of Grass*—as its centennial in 1955 made clear—has quite suddenly been restored to sophisticated favor: Whitman and his book are no longer the exclusive critical property of ideologues of the Left or of academic Levites of our official culture or of popular hucksters of Americana. Back in 1935, in an article called "Walt Whitman, Stranger," Mark Van Doren had warned that future criticism of Whitman would have to awake to the fact of "two men and a book," would have to set about studying the complex interrelation of "himself and the man he wanted to be" and the strangely ambivalent poetry that resulted from his necessity to conceal and reveal both simultaneously. The Whitman legend, of course, was already then in the process of being rejected as fact—the legend, established by the poet himself, that he in his own person was the incarnation of populist Democracy, a renascent Adam of health and potency, the charismatic progenitor of a New America. But only within the past few years have the assumptions bred by the myth in criticism been fully discredited as well. Today, just as Whitman's biographers no longer confuse (so arrantly, at least) his actual self with his life-ideal, so his imagination is no longer being confused by his critics with the thing it imagined: "the 'Walt Whitman' of *Leaves of Grass,*" as Leslie Fiedler aptly puts it, "is a *persona* really created by the poems it fictionally creates." The style of *Leaves of Grass,* then, is not "the man"—or

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is so only if the paradox is recognized that Whitman has a quirky and often contrarious wit as well as a visionary rapture in his anthems of cosmic democracy. "His center," Mr. Fiedler goes on to explain, "is a pun on the self; his poetry is a continual shimmering on the surfaces of concealment and revelation that is at once pathetic and comical." Similarly, Whitman's bravado in the face of contradictions, his pride in the mystery of his "I"—attitudes which once so exasperated critics like Winters and Blackmur as evidence of vague-been reappraised by Mr. Fiedler as a neo-Mannerist "playing with ness of sensibility or of self-heroic complacency—these have now illusion" and by Richard Chase as the subtle "guile" of a great poet's "negative capability." Clearly Whitman's enemies, and especially those among the New Critics, have been hoist with the petard of their own principles: the poet whom Ezra Pound once grudgingly acknowledged as the "pig-headed father" of modern verse has now come to inherit at least some of the virtues of his progeny.

But the central paradox, the American paradox in Whitman, has so far, it seems to me, been ignored and even obscured. Intent on affirming the poetry as independent in value of ideology or metaphysics, recent criticism has managed to be least articulate on the crucial issue of the continuity—or discontinuity—of Whitman's poetic power with his democratic doctrines. Generally the tendency has been to loosely identify Whitman's politics with the *persona* or "mask," and then to ironically dismiss those ideas as, in Mr. Fiedler's phrase, "rhetoric borrowed or misunderstood." And even Mr. Chase —author of the best book yet written on Whitman—while reminding us that we cannot "finally" separate the poet from the prophet, nevertheless concludes that "the public figure and his democratic program (valuable as these are in themselves) were the massive irrelevance and waste required for the indulgence of the essential Whitman—the young comic god and the profound elegist." But what, one is tempted to ask, of a work like *Democratic Vistas*—is that not, though in prose, an "essential" expression of Whitman, and if so, was that written by "the young comic god and the profound elegist"? In what sense is that, too, "a pun on the self"? To ask such questions may seem like semantic quibbling or an arrant leaping of contexts; but certainly to further isolate a Whitman of poetic "art"

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from what seems to me the constant enigma of his career—his assimilation in imagination, and at times his identification, of poetry and democracy—is to turn our backs on the peculiar dualism of American consciousness that was both Whitman's fact and his theme. By resting content with his paradox of self as a finally ironic contradiction of poetry and ideology, we are, it seems to me, ignoring or denying its organic coherence as the dialectical fact of Whitman's being and becoming, *as* paradox. Fascinated by the image of "two men and a book," we seem to have lost sight of the original *one* Whitman, and of that rare and ultimate unity of contradictions within the self that makes possible the acts of mind we recognize as "genius" in poetry.

At once the most personal and impersonal of modern poets, only rarely does Whitman confess any anxieties that might belie his pragmatic faith ("You shall assume what I shall assume") that all human contradictions are but phases of counterpoint in some ultimate music of hope. One of these rare moments occurs in an early poem, "The Sleepers"—a passage the vatic Whitman later deleted from his book—when almost imperceptibly the thematic major wavers, and a half-muted troubled undertone is heard:

Pier that I saw dimly last night when I looked from the windows,
Pier out from the main, let me catch myself with you and stay . . .
I will not chafe you;
I feel ashamed to go naked about the world,
And am curious to know where my feet stand . . . and what
is this flooding me, childhood or manhood . . . and
the hunger that crosses the bridge between.

Nothing else that remained in *Leaves of Grass* suggests so much of the original existential Whitman that criticism must continue to recover and understand, particularly since this is the first poet who ever insisted that his book was in reality no book: "Who touches this touches a man." "Childhood or manhood"—presumably the emotions of the bachelor Whitman never crossed the phallic bridge between them; and perhaps his book, like *The Bridge* of Hart Crane, a poet with similar conflicts, should be regarded as his imaginary marriage of worlds: in Whitman's case, a kind of spiritual Brooklyn Ferry (he once called ferries "streaming, never-failing, living poems")

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on which he could both "stand" in the eternity of imagination and yet move in time, a man like any other, toward a more fully human significance. This would seem to be the first secret of his pose: he is *poised,* perfectly balanced as he moves between possibility and the past—always with the illusion of change as progress, yet never surrendering his freedom to return—between the Long Island shore of his childhood ("Paumanok") and the world of manly ego across the bay, the "Mannahatta" and the American continent that were always for Whitman the waiting and inescapable realities.

Whitman's uncertainty, as the imagery here suggests, was always sexual. The biographical evidence, in itself inconclusive, does seem to confirm what anyone may easily intuit from the poems: that Whitman was predominantly homosexual in his elementary responses, but never, it seems, in overt conduct and perhaps never in his private relations. But the most important fact is still that ambiguity itself, his uncertainty of sexual will, and this in itself indicates—as seems evident from the auto-eroticism in "The Song of Myself"—a suspension, possibly life-long, in some childhood phase of introversion that may never have reached complete inversion. This eroticism, moreover, was further complicated, as Mark Van Doren has noted, by a condition of chronic sensory excitability known technically as *erethisia.* Whitman had an abnormal susceptibility to touch: nearly everyone who knew him well remarked that the skin on his rather large and languorous body seemed unusually soft and pink; in him, as he himself liked to say, was "the flush of the universe." By day he must have felt himself to be, as we have come to know him, the glowing epitome of health—in the American grand manner he established; but by night this same sensuous vitality might easily have abandoned him to an abysmal sense of deprivation, and in such moments, we may conjecture, he became not unlike the wandering sleeper of his poem, lost in an unknown inner "flood" of feeling, a relentless but nameless and impotent longing. This seems to have been the darker necessity animating this secretly lonely and anomalous "caresser of life": as he once confessed in a poem, "I had to let flame from me the fires that were threatening to consume me."

Whitman's adolescence seems almost wholly characterized by indolence and impressionability—a passivity of mind that produced in his youth a motley and unthinking imitation of the worldly con-

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ventions available to him, and inwardly (we remember his authorship of a temperance novel) a similarly lazy moral conformity with the great "They" of society across the bay. In his twenties, for instance, he seems to have taken up the fashionable role of Broadway dandy, sporting a cane and a *boutonnière*; and as such this shabby-genteel journalist may have found a satisfying but transient sense of identity in the *cameraderie* of work, in the Broadway crowds, at the opera, in debating societies, in Tammany meetings and rallies—and then in 1846 (the beginnings of his great change) in the confident stance he develops as the militant "Free Soil" editor of the Brooklyn *Eagle*. But perhaps all this while—until the seven obscure years, 1847-55, when *Leaves* began to materialize in his notebooks—Whitman never knew his latent sexual identity; and if it is true, as Malcolm Cowley thinks, that what provoked Whitman's poetic metamorphosis was some first fully satisfying—or profoundly disturbing—sexual experience, then what we encounter may be the crucial anomaly in a life that seems almost definable as a reversal of the normal development of self-consciousness. For perhaps it was only after reaching maturity in the world that Whitman discovered that sexual illumination of the life-processes normally experienced—without, of course, a correspondingly awakened mind—in late adolescence. This discovery of what might well have seemed to him a kind of renascent innocence would have been received, again paradoxically, by a mind of experience; and the images it evoked in the release that became the poetry were not primarily, therefore, those of some long-lost adolescent enchantment (as with Sherwood Anderson, perhaps) but those from the public world itself, from the commonplace life of a petit bourgeois "failure" already well on in his thirties, his hair already beginning to gray. And coming, moreover, so late in life, this revelation of sexual fulfillment would almost certainly have been conjoined with the first intimations of death. Thus it was, perhaps, that it became forever impossible for Whitman to dissociate mind from flesh, sex and death, experience and psyche, body and soul, one's temporal from one's immortal identity—associations, in fact, so extreme in Whitman that while they intensify his luminous feeling for death they nevertheless limit, by their emotional oversimplification, his vision of death as personal mortality. Only, I think, by assuming some such strangely revolutionary experience, possessing

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Whitman with an almost religious intensity—and bringing with it, however bitter the shock, its own joy and power of redemption—can one account for that extreme identification of the spiritual essence of life with the organic modes of its birth and dissolution (and for his view, too, of the poetic imagination as, to quote Richard Chase, "a mode of the sense of death") that lies at the heart of his sensibility and which gives his verse its universality of appeal—even to temperaments so distant as the Latin or the Catholic mind: his sense, namely, of an infinite promise in the body, his belief in the flesh as the sacred and definitive human substance.

"I cannot understand the mystery," Whitman had written in his notebook in 1847, "but I am always conscious of myself as two—as my soul and I—and I reckon it is the same with all men and women." This, the ambivalence Whitman had always known—of "childhood and manhood", of private "soul" and worldly "I"—ceased to be a mute and paralytic conflict and became his lyrical dialogue, his antiphonal "song of myself," when he felt and could express their unconscious struggle as the rhythmic energy of Eros, as not only the human but the elementary organic mystery of change and possibility in the world. And so strong was his sense of power in at last being able to find in images of non-self a relativity for his mystery, that at first it seems to have been enough for Whitman simply to "celebrate" his inward paradox:

I am satisfied—I see, dance, laugh, sing:
As God comes a loving bedfellow and sleeps at my side
all night and close on the peep of day,
And leaves for me baskets covered with white towels,
bulging the house with their plenty,
Shall I postpone my acceptation and realization, and
scream at my eyes,
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,
And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,
Exactly the contents of one, and exactly the contents of
two, and which is ahead?

Here and in most of "The Song of Myself" Whitman was content to let even such obscurely troubled questions as this stand rhythmically as their own answers: he would exult in the self as he did

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in the universe—as perfect and joyous *because* they were insoluble: "the depths are fathomless and therefore calm." But if the divine "touch" of Eros "quivers" him, as he wrote elsewhere in the poem, "to a new identity"—what, then, did his lyrical "acceptation and realization" of this new and otherwise unintelligible "self" mean to the world? In a sense, the thematic problem Whitman now faced was not unlike that of the religious novice: having been converted to the mystery whose integrity 'passeth all understanding,' he must now serve his faith, and he can only communicate it to and with others (and even to himself) as an articulate idea or ritual—which, of course, the original mystery was not. This is the inescapable irony of meaning in the paradox Whitman celebrates; and his peculiarly modern greatness in "The Song" is that he recognizes with an instinctive honesty his enigma for what it is. In his sheer lyrical momentum he is able to play happily with his mystery as both irony and unity; at times he even seems to suggest that human happiness, like his own comic happiness, is revealed by and is even to be saved by this sense of the ambiguity of reality, this cosmic joke about the self-sufficiency of our cosmic ignorance—a joke he directed expressly, perhaps (as R. W. Flint has recently suggested) at the theological high priest of his new faith, at Emerson.

Whitman, however, was never consciously prepared to welcome the ambiguities of poetry as their own justification; and if the joke of his divine comedy was aimed at Emerson, this was so because it was chiefly he who gave Whitman the means of resolving his manifold "identity" problem. "Acceptation," being "enough for myself" —this freedom of sensibility was now the necessity of his "soul"; but Puritan America had imbedded in Whitman a conscience far more conventional—in matters of practical prudence—than this Quakerish Bohemian ever cared to admit, and an ego conditioned in the Jacksonian age of his youth still felt the need to satisfy whatever it sensed to be the more consciously masculine norms, both in ideology and in conduct, of the paternal American "Mannahatta." Whitman both needed and wished to return to the 'unreal city' of his experience, even though this return meant having somehow to find or create, to "assume," a new and—however vicarious—more personalized relation with the American authority across the bay that had heretofore offered his secret individuality no means of mediation

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or self-knowledge. His rebellion, therefore, had to be both an act of love and an exorcism of his old *alter ego*—a revolt against American society only in the name of its own ideal culture. And so it was that when Whitman had his phrenological bumps read—and learned that he was a manly specimen after all; when he read Emerson and George Sand and Carlyle and found in them moral and intellectual confirmation for his mysterious "self": when he discovered in these and other sources a way to extend magically and mythologically his rhythmic fantasies of "my soul and I" into an embrace of America—then, we may conclude, the poet of the notebooks had found a way of ordering his mystery and was ready and willing to publish.

What Whitman's mythical "assumption" was we may begin to understand, not by appealing at once to 'Democracy' or 'Transcendentalism' or 'Panpsychism', but by looking closely at the great structural paradox of the first *Leaves of Grass*. We find our revealing clue, I think, in the simple and astonishing fact that in the verse itself such words as *America* and *democracy* and *en masse* occur only very rarely—at most once or twice: we find them acquiring their first significance as determining concepts only in the famous prose Preface, where Whitman heraldically announces the coming of the Cosmic Democratic Poet. This fact is symptomatic of a disparity between the Preface and the earliest poetry that has never been duly recognized—probably because, like Emerson (who saw himself in the Preface) and like all readers since, we begin to read the poetry with elaborate preconceptions of what Whitman the poet means—a preconditioning Whitman himself was the first to establish. If, however, we read the poetry with an uncommitted eye, we find that we are really never in a consciously American world, but always within the purely magical universe of Whitman's "self" and its strange visitations.[1] Whitman reintroduces us kaleidoscopically to what seems *all* the phenomena of the world, yet now somehow all transfigured: we visit the grass, the sea, oxen, beetles, buzzards, stallions, molluscs,

1 Two of the twelve poems in the first edition—later entitled "Europe" and "A Boston Ballad"—constitute exceptions to this statement. Only in verse form, however—not in character and subject-matter—can they be said to be integral with the rest of the volume. I should add that much of what I say here of the early poems is true of them only as they first appeared—not as later revised by Whitman, which is, unfortunately, the variant of the text almost always reprinted today.

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stars; suicides and murders and childbirths and shipwrecks; mechanics, sopranos, trappers, prostitutes, slaves, Indians, and Broadway buses and their drivers—but though the creatures of this world may often as it happens be Americans, we are always within a timeless and "primeval" democracy; we never find ourselves transported to transcendental realms called "America" or the "New World": we are never in a world of nationalism and ideology. It is only in the Preface that we encounter the familiar prophetic utterance we had been led to expect; only there are we told that "the United States themselves are the greatest poem," only there do we meet Whitman in the public phase of his new identity—as the would-be national bard.

This is not to say, of course, that the animus of the Preface differs radically from the spirit and style of the poetry; but the shift in focus and intention is clearly there, and indicates the duality of poetic motive that soon reveals itself as the dialectic of Whitman's career. For it is always, I think, the habitual *prose* Whitman—the aggressive editor, the would-be potent male, "of Manhattan the son" —who compulsively wills his meanings into ideology, who "promulges" vast generalizations, who "strikes up for a New World" and in doing so compensates for his ego in the real America. This was the Whitman who by printing his book accomplished his personal "realization"; but the sensibility with which it came into being belongs to the anonymous woman and child in him, to the lonely spirit of "Paumanok," of the earth and the sea and the darkened beach: the "soul" who "accepts" and "is satisfied," who sympathizes and particularizes and remembers, who knows only dumb rhythmic images and mutely caresses them. It would be wrong, however, to identify this recessive self as essentially "the poet" in Whitman; on the contrary, his poetry owes its expression, and even, in a sense, its imagination—its unity of word and image—precisely to the tendencies of his prosaic "I" to dominate with his pragmatic will in language, as he did politically in the Preface, this otherwise indeterminate lyricism of his "soul." Whitman, we remember, once called his book a "language experiment"; and like all successful revolutions in the language of verse—like the stilnovists' and Dante's, like the Elizabethans', like Dryden's and Wordsworth's—Whitman's represented a new and necessary assimilation of the modes of poetry and prose:

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a marriage of mythopoeic or symbolic motives with the trafficking language of the ordinary world. And *Leaves of Grass* was just such a success because it "celebrated" a functionally similar marriage within Whitman: between the compensatory imagination of ego and the dream-fantasies of his unconscious "soul." The result was to create in the style the figure that was nominally its author—the novel *persona* or "mask" that gave Whitman his conscious continuity in conceiving the whole of the first edition: a representative "Walt Whitman," in which "soul" and "I" had found a more than public, a more than private, "identity"; an idea of himself expressible only as a self-dramatic image, but which, in being dramatic yet unitary as an image, was also a mythical idea of the world.

In understanding this *persona* at least three dramatic components must always be distinguished—as Whitman himself suggests when, bowing into his book for the first time (which, we remember, was otherwise anonymous), it takes him three distinct phrases to properly introduce himself:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos

The first of these faces we may readily identify as the Whitman of Manhattan, the democratic ideologue of the Preface; the second we recognize as his compensatory masculine image of himself—the cocky, indolent young workingman of the anonymous daguerrotype frontispiece (actually, and intentionally so, Whitman here seems much more "rough" in his costume than in his pose or looks); while the third, the "kosmos," is the most functionally mythical aspect of the *persona* —the furthest from worldly ego and the closest to his dream life—the fantastic, serio-comic mask of godhead whereby Whitman resolved in imagination the contradictions of his conscious identity into a divinely free and conventionally lawless unity of opposites. This cosmic "self" suggests, of course, his debt to Emerson; but the stylistic life of Whitman's "kosmos" suggests also a rebellious conspiracy against the romantic transcendentalism from which it derives. Actually we find this and other Emersonian ideas serving Whitman as little more than conscious 'motifs,' while beneath this surface the value of the divine mask lies precisely in the power it gave Whitman to escape from Emerson's divine solemnities—from Platonic notions of the divine; and for a poet this meant a necessary freedom to

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transcend the received logic of his metaphors. With part of his mind, of course, Whitman took Emersonian mysticism seriously, but here again the value to the poetry lay in his having found a philosophical authority for regarding the contradictory depths in himself as a microcosm, not of human nature only, but of all reality: he was thus able to accept as an elemental power the essentially androgynous demands of his imagination. Thus assured of an absolute anonymity, his "soul" could now freely wander forth in the infinitudes of imagination, not only as a spirit "maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man," but as the vagabond "touch" of Eros and death, as the dynamic Itself of the universe. Now, too, with such a universal soul in its body, the "rough" male *persona*—the incarnate "I" of this "kosmos"—was free to vicariously love and caress not only its own but all bodies and all souls. And if the prose ideologue in Whitman was still troubled by this monstrous indulgence—and the self-defense of the Preface indicates that he was—there was always, as an ultimate justification, the glorious image of the Poet that the intoxicated humanism of the time afforded him. The Poet, wrote the Scottish poet, Alexander Smith—some of whose lines Whitman once quoted as a "grand announcement"—must "reflect our great humanity," must "sprout fragrantly green leaves" like the life-giving Spring, must "sphere the world" with his "heart of love": and in *Leaves of Grass,* thanks to the literalism of Whitman's imagination, this romantic rhetoric became amazingly incarnate—so much so, in fact, that most of Whitman's humanist contemporaries never recovered from their shock of recognition and were never to avow this giant bred by their own idealism.

However much indebted to the existing tradition for his messianic image of the poet-prophet, Whitman knew that he could never adapt the diction and manner of the contemporary romanticism to the vast expressive needs of his "kosmos"—necessities that proved revolutionary enough to overthrow ultimately in English literary culture the pious notion of poetry as a ritual dedicated to an absolute Protestant Good and its ministering angel of Beauty. The literary liberation of Whitman's "soul" became complete—and his *persona* may be said to have properly come into being—when his generalized reaction to conventionality still inchoately represented in the compensatory *imago* of the "rough" ("Washes and razors for

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foofoos—for me freckles and a bristling beard") joined with his ideological compulsions in willing the act of phallic boldness, the "oath of procreation," that became the metaphor of his "language experiment": "This day I am jetting the stuff of far more arrogant republics."

That seminal "stuff" for Whitman was the potency of the American vernacular, and expecially the idiom of the new popular culture filtering in from the West—not so much its monstrosities of diction (he preferred his own "kosmos words") but its flair and grotesquerie and the genius of its slang for symbolic "indirection." Out of the same Jacksonian *zeitgeist* that had produced in American humor what Constance Rourke calls "the gamecock of the Western wilderness," Whitman fashioned his primitive "rough" *persona,* and like the gamecock, the proof of his *charisma* was his ability to talk big, to swagger with words. "I like limber, lasting, fierce words," he wrote in his *American Primer,* ". . . strong, cutting, beautiful, rude words. To the manly instincts of the People they will forever be welcome." And so, then, of course, *he* would, too: inevitably his egoistic motive recognizes its opportunity. "Words follow character," he wrote; and if he was to show himself a "a great user of words," was he not then giving proof that he really had, as the phrenologists assured him, these "natural propensities in himself"? But when he wrote his first poetry—before, like a ventriloquist, he had fashioned the visual dummy of the frontispiece for the 'character' of the voice he was able to 'throw'—Whitman was primarily interested in accomplishing the anonymous release of his "soul": his *persona* was still only the unembarrassed voice of his "kosmos"—"gross, hankering, mystical, nude":

Flaunt of the sunshine I need not your bask—lie over!
I too am not a bit tamed—I too am untranslatable

The last scud of day holds back for me;
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadowed wilds;
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,

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And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef d'oeuvre for the highest,
And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven . . .

Such lines as these were not, however, mere somersaults of verbal bravado, a witty indemnification for a sentimental pantheism or a mindless anarchic innocence—"a wild soft laughter," as Carl Sandburg would have it. The more we attend to them, in fact, the more we observe that they represent in their tonal inference nothing less than the meaning Whitman has found for the contradictions of the world. What the playful irony of his voice establishes for us as we read is the medium of feeling that Whitman imagines as existing between all beings in the world; for in line after line we learn that what it primarily means to have being of any kind—to have any sort of identity, animate or inanimate—is to be a manifest challenge, a "mocking taunt" to all other identities. This irony, however, remains playful because it expresses not only the oblique point of view of identity, of "each," but the loving irony of the poet who, from the omniscient vantage of the "all," represents the experience of being in all its continuity. From the point of view of each identity, existence is essentially ironical: there is nothing quite like itself in the whole world. But although there is a constant chaos and struggle of identities—and consequently suffering, death and defeat (which do *not* go unrepresented in Whitman's world)—the "mocking taunt" is not finally ironic because no identity, whether destroyed or destroying, "countervails" another. Everything has its *thereness,* is "in its place"; has its own body, its own involvement with itself, its own perfection, and is therefore "great." And in having absolute joy or possession of itself, in being individual, it obeys the common "law of perfections": that law of "precision and balance," as he says in the Preface, which was Whitman's own way of enjoying himself and which became, therefore, his principle of perception—the ontology of his vision and the individualistic aesthetic of his "free verse."

What is it, then, to be a self in such a universe? Like all animate identities, Whitman's self finds its positive life in the "dilation and pride" of being, in the will to power; and even love, having its roots, like all emotion, in sexual energy, partakes of this challenge

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"to be master." The human self, however, is itself a microcosm of struggling identities, in which "body" and "soul" and all the contradictory powers of Whitman's being contend and conspire to woo the secret and elusive beloved, "the Me myself." But the self always escapes from itself as from all other impinging identities, and when it does, the roles are soon reversed: then Whitman's "I" is the pursuer of the miraculous secret of power and love, the mystery whose "mocking taunt" winks back at him from the manifold interplay of the universe. (Here we glimpse the ironic relation that obtains in the poetry between Whitman *in propria persona* and his "kosmos" of Eros, which can only be imagined as existing in the world, and yet when felt or experienced becomes a mystery again by passing into his feeling, into "myself.") The secret thus turns out to be the joy and the style of its pursuit: unlike the romantic secret in *Faust,* the secret may only be sought and felt and loved *as* a secret, for all beings may only share the secret they can never know—the miracle of "touch" or "urge" that "quivers" them all to "identity." To have the self-experience of "identity," then, is not only to imitate the universal life in its expression of energy, but to imitate the universe in its secret balance, to recoil from all extremes and repose upon one's self as a secret, exactly as the body does. (Perhaps this helps to explain, too, Whitman's imagination of death as the perfection of "identity.") Whitman's irony, therefore, being inevitably a self-expression, rises and falls as only a phase of his balance, and must finally yield to the higher paradox of love that Whitman as the poet recognizes. For if "precision and balance" is the law of the body, then there is hope that the power of Eros may also order itself as a self-redemptive law in the world ("a kelson of the creation is love"), exactly as it does in his poetry.

This, then, insofar as it yields to analysis, is what I take to be Whitman's vision of the organic democracy of all things—and it will be seen at once how radically American this view of the world is. But the very intensity of Whitman's awareness of his vision seems to have bred a confusion of values and of the planes of thought and being, especially when the same voice modulated into the proselytic will of the Preface attempted to translate a poet's love into the democratic ethos of "sympathy and pride" and poetic "laws of perfection"

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into an evolutionary American "fruition." The irony of the "untranslatable" mystery begins to disappear in the very year of publication, for in the performance of 1856 Whitman has already begun to lose the delicate balance of his paradox. The first *Leaves of Grass,* the actual book, seems to have served Whitman as a kind of mirror, in which the *persona,* having acquired objective reality, saw itself for the first time; and from that moment, as it were, Whitman's love was less for his democratic mystery than for its American image. It is almost as if Whitman had looked too long at his own frontispiece, and had then begun primping to make good on his specifications for an "athletic bard," forgetting that this new "self" was not its own reality but an attitude, an imaginative way of speaking, a "language experiment." What was happening, of course, was what Nietzsche describes as the "typical velleity" of the artist: "tired to the point of despair of the eternal 'unreality' and falseness of innermost being," he is tempted to think that he actually *is* the object he is able to represent, imagine or express; and then, attempting to have real existence, he "trespasses on the forbidden ground" of actuality. Almost from the moment of his first creativity—in his attempt to somehow convert his "mystery" into a reclamation of ego; in his effort to put on the musical power of his imaginative experience and *be* the "personality" of his liberating Eros; in his necessity to find an epic American significance for his rebellious lyrical impulses—almost at once Whitman's career begins confirming the truth of Nietzsche's warning.

This American self-consciousness, first stylistically apparent in 1856, in the third (1860) edition became overwhelming. The writer of most of these new poems is trying manfully to be the poet of his Preface; and Whitman was, in fact, so enamoured of the Preface that one of the new additions, "Poem of Many in One" (later retitled "By Blue Ontario's Shore"), is almost literally a paraphrase of it—a poem filled with almost nothing but self-exhortations. This poem really inaugurates a change in Whitman's style and intention that has never been sufficiently remarked; for in almost all the new poems, even when not explicitly "Chants Democratic," some form of incantation has become the dominant stylistic mode. The difference between Whitman's voice in the later editions and the "I" of the first *Leaves* might be described as the difference between a

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speaker on a platform—or an operatic soloist intoning a recitative (Whitman's own perilous analogy)—and a solitary "soul" standing up to speak in the silence of a Quaker meeting, and whose impassioned speech may, as 'the spirit moves,' modulate into rhapsodic rhythms of song. The first poems, moreover, had been written almost conversationally, addressed as an intimate letter to a personal and private "you"; but Whitman's "you" had now become essentially plural, the collective democratic conscience of America. And motivating this new "vocalism" was a change in Whitman's conception of his book: it was no longer simply the testament of an individual "modern," but "the new Bible"—a democratic missal and *vade mecum* for the entire nation, but especially for teachers, "mediums," "savans," "oratists." And since the "leader of leaders" was, as the prose Whitman had written, the native bard, he was now being true to his word:

> *Chanter of Personality, outlining a history yet to be,*
> *I project the ideal man, the American of the future.*

Throughout the nineteenth century much of the impulse to poetry was by way of overt or secret reaction to an abstract humanism or to bourgeois rationalism; and when he began *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman, too, had been reacting to an overexposure to ideology: like Wordsworth, like Mill and Carlyle, his "soul" had protested: "But where am I in all this?" Yet in seeking a freedom from the slavery of abstractions, his "soul" sought also to satisfy its craving for love; and by 1860 Whitman had found a way to anneal both his biological and his ideological compulsions into the single programmatic purpose of creating an American "Stock-Personality," a national comradeship, a "One Identity" for "ye partial, diverse lives." And so intense was this will that Whitman remained unaware that, in substance if not in form, his poetry was slowly receding to his habitual prose—an attrition of imaginative power that might, in fact, be demonstrated almost wholly in terms of the progressive socialization of his once unconscious "soul."

Emerging from the oceanic dream-world of "The Sleepers," "soul" first becomes immediately identified with democratic feeling in the homosexually haunted "Calamus" poems; is elevated to an abstract identity with "America" in the "Chants Democratic" of

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the same year (1860); then acquires perhaps its most intensified patriotic assimilation in *Drum-Taps* (1865); and at last achieves its apotheosis—and returns to its original seas—as it disappears over the ethereal "deep waters" of "Passage to India." In the democratic "personality" as first adumbrated in the Preface of 1855, Whitman's elegiac "soul" had been scarcely perceptible; but by 1860 the "American Soul" had developed "equal hemispheres" that henceforth remained constant: not only the "Dilation and Pride" of the male *persona,* but "Love." "I believe," he wrote in this edition, "the main purport of these states is to found a superb friendship, exalté, previously unknown"—an aspiration that might have barely recommended itself in Whitman's editorials, but coming as it does in one of the "Calamus" lyrics, its vapid flaccidity of statement succeeds only in rendering suspect the honesty and force of a sentiment whose sole credentials are such bathetic words. Yet to this manifest deterioration Whitman remained blind, perhaps because he now sought for his effects less in the single line than in the cumulative hypnosis of his chants; his obsessive concern now was almost literally to *enchant,* to conjure the disguised fiction of his "soul" into an evolutionary actuality: "These States, what are they except Myself?" And the more, of course, Whitman instinctively recognized that his ideal of "the manly love of comrades" was politically absurd or even sexually perverse, the more he was forced to abandon the "indirection" of ambiguous but concrete images and resort to the rhetoric, sentimental and declamatory by turns, of his redeeming Logos. Thus we soon witness a resurrection in the verse of the old pre-poetic identifications: the dandy with his pseudo-French, the editor with a fatal fondness for the orotund phrase. Exclamation points now become rife; Soul and Body are honored with capital letters—as they never were in the first edition; such "orbic flexes" of Whitman's mouth as

> *Americanos! conquerors! marches-humanitarian!*
> *Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!*

—these begin to lard the pages.

History itself came to the rescue of his incantatory style; if there had been no Civil War, as he himself once remarked in old age, *Leaves of Grass* might never have been continued. What the war gave Whitman was nothing less than a world of human sub-

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stance for his emotional solipsism—a theatre, a living libretto, and a supporting American cast for his arias and recitatives of "One Identity" and "the Divine Average." The war, however, merely confirmed him in his own compulsions; immersed in the mystical unionism of the time, he never recognized what another poetic intelligence might have learned: that one cannot be both an epic and a lyric poet in the same breath, for to be both is to be, as Homer or Dante were, a consciously dramatic poet also—something that Whitman's peculiar constitution forbade. Perhaps only once in the later Whitman, in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," do the *vates* and the *poeta* unite to produce the masterful "psalm of the republic" of which Whitman dreamed; but this poem, too, owes the magnificence of its music and its concreteness of vision to the spell of a personal theme, the intuition of his own death as prefigured in Lincoln's. With the sole exceptions of this poem and of "Passage to India" (which, however, is only incidentally about America), Whitman in the years after 1856 is able to sustain his moments of lyrical genius only by reaction from his own epic ego—when, as in "Out of the Cradle" and in other poems of the "Sea Drift" series, the thought of death or abandonment or loneliness makes him recoil from the fictional personality that had chanted only perpetual prefaces to an illusion. And in one of these, in "As I Ebbed with the Ocean of Life," his "soul" seems almost on the verge of renouncing its mythical synthesis; for a brief moment the mask that the war was soon to restore to him falls, and we hear again in its fullness—and for the last time in *Leaves of Grass*—the original irony of his "mystery":

O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth,
Oppressed with myself that I have dared to open my mouth,
Aware now that amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me I have not once had the least idea who or what I am,
But that before all my arrogant poems the real Me stands yet untouch'd, untold, altogether unreach'd,
Withdrawn far, mocking me with mock-congratulatory signs and bows,
With peals of distant ironical laughter at every word I have written,
Pointing in silence to these songs, and then to the sand beneath,

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I perceive I have not really understood anything, not a single object,
and that no man ever can,
Nature here in sight of the sea taking advantage of me to dart upon
me and sting me,
Because I was assuming so much,
Because I have dared to open my mouth at all.

In that "distant ironical laughter" many of Whitman's critics have heard not only the doom of his American legend, but the judgment of time against his claims to major greatness as a poet. Today it is temptingly easy to conclude with Santayana, for instance, that Whitman was a poet of "barbarism" who muddled the ideal and the real; or with D. H. Lawrence that Whitman, having mistaken Eros for sympathy, lost his genius in "the old love idea"; or with Esther Shephard that Whitman's democratic "personality" was a derivative literary pretense; or with Leslie Fiedler that we should wholly discount "the absurd ideas, the outlived posturing" and find Whitman's measure of greatness only in the darker elegies or in his witty and sly manipulations of the mythic role he was "condemned to play." No doubt each of these judgments has its relevance, and all needed to be forcefully made; but neither singly nor together are they conclusive for our time, as no judgment can be that rests content with a disjunction of human values. For ultimately we must and do judge poetry as we judge character and will; we judge style not as an artifice but as a voice; we judge the poet, or at least the modern poet, not by his intelligence regarded absolutely but by his human breadth and depth, by the largeness of the risks he takes in his "criticism of life," by his power and his luck to make his work a fact of culture—an embodiment of the spiritual dialectics of his world. And even the failures in such a body of work are exemplary. If they should lack what Whitman had often achieved—the "precision and balance" of art—they testify the more strongly, therefore, to the constant modern need to sustain an ever more substantial balance of the human fact with human possibilities; though they should lack all other virtue, they bear witness to the stubborn integrity of a mind that "insists," as William James insisted, "that the ideal and the real are dynamically continuous."

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Whitman's worst failures, moreover, are in part redeemed by their American inevitability. His later poetry may be said to have succumbed to that "void" in American style that Tocqueville describes as a condition of the democratic consciousness—that hiatus we continually recognize in Whitman, widening as his career progressed, between "minute and clear" images of individualized perception and his "general and vague" ideas. But if Whitman still remains the most obvious victim of that void in our literature, perhaps he is so only because no other writer before or since has experienced those contradictions so immediately and so inwardly.

In his sexual loneliness, isolated in a society composed only of other egos, in an America no longer consistently Puritan—without absolutes, without a patriarchal tradition to mediate between self and world, Whitman found his only pragmatic salvation in the trick most Americans since have learned to play on the tininess and immensity of their egos: he saw but one way to mediate between ego and others—between fact and desire, idea and circumstance, present and future—and that was to assume "personality," to make the self an image of life (a 'life-style') in its own consciousness, at once the symbol of its conditioned reality and of its chosen possibilities. But being the poet he was, Whitman was finally content with no other image of personality than the whole of life as he saw it. He wanted every American to be a "kosmos"—to live in the macrocosmic wholeness of the life-process his poetry envisioned; to be capable of adapting all human diversities as potentials of thought and feeling in themselves; and for Whitman that meant, as a test case, to be as much in love with death as with life. That such ego-transcendence could not only be realized but made average; that the void of modern individualism could be "absorbed" by a sympathetic "merging"; that the spiritual *unitas multiplex* of his poetry might be commuted into life; that "America" means the consummation of history and a millenarian liberation from the evils of the past—all this is the sublime "innocence" in Whitman that our criticism has justly sought to discredit as the most extreme manifestation of the perilous optimism that pervades so much of our literature. And yet this very extremism should remind us that Whitman's dream, as his "I" never ceases to tell us, was only his "assumption"—and an "arrogant" one at that.

His chosen "personality" is not finally, then, to be defined by the

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innocence that was his myth, but by the character of his *will* to innocence, by the dynamics of his creative struggle with American actuality—by the inclusiveness of his will to convert the tyrannous conditions of consciousness Tocqueville described into functions of individuality, to assimilate experience with all its evils into modes of significant continuity with his own being. And the fact is that the lasting consequence to culture of Whitman's struggle to equate the American fact with its European myth has not really been a confirmation of our endemic innocence but a livelier consciousness of our conditions and an enhanced sensitivity to the immediacies of existence; an augmented awareness of the possible only as it exists in the actual; a greater capacity to experience life as the substance of culture and to know our culture as it issues from life. As a result of Whitman's "general and vague" throes in the void he inherited, 'Democracy' is no longer the "general and vague" verbalism it once was; and the once nugatory "minute and clear" particularities of our individual experience have acquired a poetic *mana* and a communicability with ideas—and even, insofar as we remember Whitman, a democratic significance—that they might never have had if the past century had left us only the lyrical heritage of its Emersons and its Tennysons to introduce us psychically to our world.

Nevertheless, as Whitman's enemies have always argued, the greatness of his cultural example or influence does not alter the character of his verse as it stands immutably before us on the printed page; his poetry *as* poetry, they argue, is vitiated, and perhaps to the core, precisely by this constant confusion of poetry and life. Admittedly, Whitman surrendered to his velleities; he confounded what might be called the "pure" and the "practical" imaginations; but we today, in our sensitivity to this characteristically 'Romantic' error, just as extremely dissociate them—and our understanding of Whitman's individuality and our ability to respond to his power (as distinct from its mythical modes) have suffered accordingly. Leslie Fiedler, for instance, seems to me the victim of a fashionable metaphor—and of his own brilliant penchant for generalization—when he fails to distinguish Whitman's unique consciousness from the 'void' described by Tocqueville: he concludes that Whitman's personal devotion to his "mask" was a "peculiarly American duplicity, that doubleness of our self-consciousness . . . which arises from our belief that

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what we dream rather than what we are is our essential truth." But to the extent that Whitman's "mask" was not only his "dream" but his will and his becoming, the peculiar "doubleness" of his self-consciousness can only be described as the constant interpenetration of will and imagination—a reciprocity we are likely to forget was responsible for *both* Whitman's successes and his failures. For just as his characteristic failing is the loss of imagination in an excess of personal will, so what constant greatness he possesses lies in that power of expression where will and imagination meet, in that aspect of style we can only call "voice." The quality of his style is always that of a personal voice; and at his best Whitman is able not only to represent uniquely his own will in words and in rhythms but to make his imagination of the world function as expression, as *speech*. This, it seems to me, is a secret, if not *the* secret, of all poetic achievement; and the extent to which this power of voice in Whitman, manifest even in his "blab," is no longer felt or acknowledged is evidence of that secret's having been already lost to our contemporary sensibility.

With all our concern today for the plastic "tensions" and "ambiguities" of "language," we seem to have lost touch with the dramatic ambiguity and immediacy of the speaking voice; and the inevitable consequence has been that we find in the typical verse of our magazines today style and "mask" without voice: the same poetic tongue and no tongue; much orchestration of speech phrases, but no speech; much dedication to 'meaning,' but little or no imaginative *will,* no urgency or insistence, even a quiet insistence, to make that meaning prevail. One can only dubiously generalize from a single instance of genius, but Whitman's example should indicate that the acts of a poet's imagination may always implicate, and their force may even depend upon, the will to possibility in life; and the *persona* in poetry, therefore, may not be a "mask" to be "dreamed" by the imagination of "art," but a voice inseparable, however distinct, from "personality" in life. And the will to such "personality" may not be limited, as we think, to 'Romantic' temperaments like Whitman's, but may be in some degree indispensable to poetry of any significance in the modern world—if, that is, the quality of the animating and mediating voice be admitted as a distinctive attribute of the best modern verse; and we need only look beyond Whit-

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man and beyond the Romantics to Emily Dickinson, to Yeats, to Eliot or to Marianne Moore to see that it surely is.

The secret of voice in poetry, though a gift and an always individual mystery, is not, however, free of circumstance—as would seem to be the implicit assumption of so many poets today, most of whom are still engaged in writing what R. P. Blackmur not long ago described as "a court poetry without a court". Properly to sustain the gift of poetic voice in America, if this worst abstraction of all is to be avoided—a poetry of images without a medium, the false concreteness of an arbitrary symbolism—would seem to require an awareness, in the spirit though no longer in the manner of Whitman, of the demands and pressures of our democratic conditioning. And paradoxically enough, the democratic ethos—however inimical to poets in other crucial respects—need not be the absolute enemy of a poet's imagination: insofar as our conformist conditioning, with its tendencies to assimilation and its compulsive curiosity in the 'other,' encourages a sensitivity to speech and idiom and vocal gesture, it may actually serve poetry, as it certainly did Whitman's. A protean "metaphysical" tradition in our literature has always resisted the truth of this paradox; Emerson was its most notable exemplar in Whitman's time; and whenever Whitman insisted—and always vehemently—on his essential independence from his "master," what he was really defending, it seems to me, was precisely this original integrity of his poetic sensibility and his native democratic sense. Emerson, Whitman observed, however much he worshipped the Democracy of the "all," could never participate in the multitudinous variety of the American "each"—and in a single telling phrase Whitman once epitomized Emerson's weakness: he was not an "artist in humanity." For Emerson, still a Puritan in mind, never really knew as an intuition the insight that has enabled *Leaves of Grass* to survive as the anthem of the modern consciousness: the simple paradox that although "identity," the "soul," is the ultimate in human values, nevertheless value *to* the self, that which the self most wills and desires, resides not in the depths of individual spirit, but in the extensional conditioned self in the world, in "humanity." The function of the individual and of the poet is not, then, as Emerson thought, to create values from spirit and to bestow these on a materially drugged world, but to transfigure the world's values, to accomplish, in the famous

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phrase of Nietzsche, a "transvaluation of values." Nietzsche, however, was a kind of inverse Emerson; his danger, as he himself confessed, was a "loathing of mankind": his own transvaluation became a contradiction of humanity. And so, in a vastly different sense, Whitman's did, too—at that point in his career when he ceased to transfigure values in speech: when, after 1856, his rhythms lost touch with the native idiom of communication where the battle between self and society is first joined; when, intent on being "America" instead of being simply American, he was forced to resort to the mythical language of his abstract incantation, whose ideal vision of men and things could no longer capture the mystery of their mock-congratulatory signs and bows.

But in the great poems of 1855-56, Whitman remained true to his instinct for that descriptive law of our literature that Mark Twain similarly confirmed in our fictional prose—the truth, namely, that since no "classic" American tradition exists, there can be no significant idiom in our literature that is not a personal voice bearing a personalized vision; and conversely, there can be no personal voice—no way of even communicating with ourselves—that is not an individuation of American *speech,* which is incessantly dynamic for this very reason. "Speech," said Whitman in "The Song of Myself," "is the twin of my vision"; and if his later folly lay in confounding self-consciously his vision and his American *persona* of speech as the identical "I" of his American "personality," the wisdom of principle in that failure lay in his recognition that the democratic idiom and the personal vision of poetry must live together and cohere dialectically, as they are born together, in the same creative consciousness. If not—if an awareness of modern contradictions is allowed to overcome this sense of our original paradox, then, as is proverbially said of all twins, idiom or vision may cease to be itself when the other dies—and this, as it was Whitman's burden of truth, was also his fate as a poet.

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Alexander Yashin

THE LEVERS*

In the evening in the kolkhoz office, as always, a kerosene lamp was burning and a battery radio crackling. A program of marches was on, though hardly audible. At a rectangular pine table four persons sat talking. The tobacco smoke was so thick that the flame in the lamp barely flickered, as during a large meeting. It seemed that even the radio was crackling because of all the smoke in the hut. On the table there stood an earthenware pot for cigarette butts. It was already full. From time to time fire flared up from a cigarette tossed into the pot. Then the bearded livestock breeder Tsipyshev would cover the pot with a fragment of broken plate glass from the table top. Every time this was done someone cracked one and the same joke: "Burn your beard, and the cows will stop being afraid of you."

To which Tsipyshev invariably replied, "If they stop being afraid, then maybe they'll increase the milk yield."

And everyone laughed.

They shook cigarette ash on the floor, on the windowsills, but threw only butts into the pot.

They had been sitting long, talking unhurriedly—a little about everything—and trustingly, without circumspection, like old and good friends.

Through the semi-darkness there peered from the timbered walls

* ED. NOTE: This story, by a young Soviet writer of fiction and poetry, appeared in *Literary Moscow,* Vol. II, 1956, during the brief period of cultural liberalization that followed the attack on Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress. Now that orthodoxy is again enforced, the story is virtually unobtainable in the Soviet Union. It has figured prominently and repeatedly in official and semi-official denunciations of "subversive" trends in literature.

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some chance placards and slogans, a list of the members of the kolkhoz with a monthly record of the number of workdays put in, a fragment of an old wall newspaper and an empty all-black slate divided into two equal parts by a white line. On one half was written in chalk "black," on the other half—"red."

"You know they brought sugar again to the kolkhoz shop a couple of days ago," said the storehouse keeper, Sergei Shchukin, the youngest of those present, in whose dress a citified appearance was already to be noted. He wore a shirt with a tie. From the breast pocket of his jacket a fountain pen and a comb protruded.

"Someone let you in on it, eh?" slyly asked a third person of those seated at the table, a stout, somewhat bloated man missing his left arm, with a bedraggled tarpaulin raincoat—apparently of wartime vintage—thrown about him.

"No one let me in on it. Mikola himself sent a woman around to my house with about two kilograms, saying we'd settle later."

"And you took it?"

"I did. If you don't, you can sit all your life without sugar. You, too, would have taken it."

"Well, he won't send *you* any, Piotr Kuz'mich!" Tsipyshev said laughing in his beard, and screwing up his eyes in a sideward glance at the one-armed man. "He's mad at you. But Sergei is in good with him," he said turning to Shchukin, "Sergei didn't remove him from his storehouse post, even though he took his place."

Sergei Shchukin had just recently been an ordinary kolkhoznik. On entering the Party a month before, he began to talk about the fact that all commanding positions in the kolkhoz should be filled by Communists, and that it was simply embarrassing now for him not to advance to a better job. He met with agreement. It was remembered that the kolkhoz storehouse keeper had already been spoken to several times for stealing and Shchukin was put into the storehouse. At the scheduled general meeting no one saw any reason to object to this decision. Shchukin bought himself a fountain pen and began to wear a tie. And his predecessor went to work in the kolkhoz shop. It was about him that there was now talk.

"As far as taking the sugar goes, I took it," said Shchukin after some thought, "but where is the justice of it, after all? Where does the sugar go, where's the soap, where is everything?" After these

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words he reached for his comb and began to smooth back his thick young unruly hair.

Then the fourth person present put in his word, "Why do you need justice, you're now the storehouse keeper."

The fourth person was a man of middle age, but already graying, pale, and apparently not very well. He smoked incessantly, more than everyone else, and coughed a good deal. When he stretched his hand toward the pot to discard the stub of a cigarette that had already singed his fingers, his big thick nails could be seen, and under the nails earth—not dirt, but earth. This was the brigadier of the farming brigade, Ivan Konoplev. He had the reputation of being a fair man, but irascible. He spoke rarely but caustically. Usually no one was offended by his sharp words; apparently people did not sense in them any dislike toward themselves. Shchukin likewise was not offended.

But the one-armed man, whom all called by both his first and middle names, Piotr Kuz'mich, objected, "Well, justice—you know that's necessary. That's what keeps us going. Only I, for one, fellows, don't understand something again. I can't understand what is going on in our district. You know, they said, plan from the bottom, let the kolkhoz decide what is best for it to sow and what isn't. But they don't confirm the plan. For the third time they've returned it for corrections. It seems they collected all the kolkhoz plans, weighed them, and it turned out—they don't agree with the district plan. But the district plan is given from above. You can't make much out of this either. Well, so an obstacle has been struck. The sparks fly, but nothing comes of it. Again there's nothing left of our plan. That's justice for you. They don't believe in us."

"Justice in our district is given a seat only in honorary presidiums, so that it shouldn't be offended and should keep quiet," said the pale Konoplev and tossed a butt into the pot.

Shchukin also put in his word, "Justice is needed only for meetings, on solemn occasions, just like criticism and self-criticism. It can't apply in real practice—isn't this what it comes down to?"

A guarded and somehow uneasy look suddenly crossed Tsipyshev's face. It seemed this confidential conversation had ceased to please him.

"Okay, hammer away, but mind where the chips fly," he re-

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marked roughly to Shchukin; and immediately changed his tone, as though he regretted his bluntness. "Justice, brother, is justice. . . . But, now, give *you* a seat in an honorary presidium and you'll even stop seeing the ground below you," he said and laughed, shaking his mustaches and beard.

Tsipychev's beard grew not only on his chin but on his cheeks and behind his ears, merged with his thick reddish brows, hung over his eyes and when Tsipyshev laughed, his whole face laughed, his whole beard, and his eyes shone from somewhere out of the depths of hair.

"I was the other day to the district committee to see the big man himself," continued Piotr Kuz'mich, referring thus to the first secretary of the district committee. "What are you doing with us, I say. The kolkhozniks won't agree to change the plan for the third time, they'll take offense. We need flax. It's flax that we should seed our best land with. We've already had experiments with both rabbits and crop rotation. How many people were used up for nothing! As a result there was no grain—which just did the state harm. Let me have, I say, just ten, well let's say, twenty hectares for the first time, but not a hundred, not a thousand. When we get used to it, we'll add on to it ourselves, we ourselves will ask for more. Don't give everything at once. 'No!' he says, 'at once. You've got to.' he says, 'overfulfill the plan, you've got to actively implant the new.' Actively, all right, I say, let it be active, but you know this is the north and there are not many people and the land wants its own way. You have to persuade people. Lenin pointed out—you must actively persuade. And he says, 'Well, it's up to you to persuade then! We persuaded you before, when we organized the kolkhozes, now you persuade the others, carry out the party line. You,' he says, 'are now our levers out in the country.' So he says, but he himself just shrugs. It seems, not everything is so sweet for him either. But there's no give in him, he doesn't understand what the party wants, he's afraid to understand."

"It's a rough situation!" said Shchukin as though interpreting these words, and again reached for his comb.

"And it won't be sweet. He won't sit here long anyway," said Tsipyshev. "He's taken the wrong approach to people, he's too strict. He doesn't listen to people, he decides everything himself. People

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for him are only levers. But I look at it this way, boys, this is exactly what bureaucracy is. Let's say, we come to him for a meeting. Well, talk like a human being, simply and openly. No, he can't without being strict, he's absolutely got to be boss. The way he takes a look around at everyone down his nose and snarls, 'Let's begin, comrades! All assembled?' Well, the heart goes out of you and so you sit, waiting to be cussed out. If he'd only come out with it straight, when something is not right! People would move mountains for one straightforward word. No, he can't.

"He thinks that the party will lose authority if he talks with the people like a human being, in a plain way. Why, he knows that we earn in the kolkhoz 100 grams for a workday, but he repeats the same thing over and over: with every year the earning power of the workday is growing and prosperity becoming greater. There are no cows left in our kolkhoz, but he goes on: with every year cattle raising in the kolkhoz is increasing and on a more solid basis. Why doesn't he say—you aren't living so hot because of this and this . . . but we will live better. Say it—and people will take to their work more willingly."

"It's a rough situation!" said Shchukin, again concluding Piotr Kuz'mich's heated words.

Ivan Konoplev was finishing off another cigarette. He appeared on edge and constantly trying to say something—apparently something harsh and caustic—but a severe asthmatic cough suddenly seized him and forced him from the table. At the doorway Konoplev lifted the broom and spat long into the corner. The livestock breeder Tsipyshev said to him sympathetically, "Changed your tobacco, again, probably, did you? I told you long ago—smoke only makhorka, the stalk variety, it'll be easier on you."

Having coughed up a bit, but still without straightening up, Konoplev raised his head and said hoarsely: "Our district heads have lost the habit of how to talk with the people, they're ashamed. They understand everything themselves but are afraid to take the leap. What's persuasion have to do with this? They're relying on levers. They see the boarded up homes in the village, but don't want to talk of this out loud. All there's concern about is that there be all round numbers in the reports. But what about people, what are they left with?" And Konoplev again was racked with coughing.

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"All right, all right, keep quiet, or your whole soul will jump out of you!" Tsipyshev got up from the table and went to the doorway to Konoplev. "You wait a bit, Ivan, we'll wangle a pass to a rest home for you from the district committee. You'll go to the ocean for the air, at the same time you'll have a look at how people live there, you'll learn a few things and tell us about it. You'll give us all a bracing up."

Konoplev met him with an impatient motion of his hand as though to say, "Sit, why are you coming over here, go away!" but because of his coughing could not say a word. Tsipyshev returned to the table.

"His wife will give him such a pass, he won't recognize his own family afterward," said Shchukin. "She's a sharp one. Cough as much as you like, smoke, drink, only don't take a step away from her."

"Our air here is not worse than sea air," noted Piotr Kuz'mich musingly. "Air we have! It used to be once, to cure a cough, you went to a tar-works or tapped resin. A man would live three—four weeks in a pine woods, would gather some of this resin from boxes into barrels and without noticing it, all of a sudden, he's making money and at the same time his breathing's easier. Do they buy this resin anywhere nowadays? Somehow I haven't heard about it. They made some kind of turpentine out of it and rosin for violinists. Now, I bet, they play without rosin."

"They've substituted plastic for it. Take a look!" Shchukin showed his comb. "It's also made out of plastic."

No one looked at Shchukin's comb.

"Our lamp is dying out altogether, boys." Tsipyshev raised his beard in the air.

From the doorway, Konoplev responded, "You'll die out without air. Even a lamp needs air."

For the last time Konoplev rattled the dry broom and returned to the table. His face was pale, his breathing difficult.

"I understand our situation this way," he said. "Until there's trust in the most ordinary peasant in the kolkhoz, things won't work right, we'll have no little grief ahead to swallow. They write in our papers—a new man has appeared. True—he's appeared! The kolkhoz has made over the peasant. True—it made him over. The

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peasant is no longer what he was. Good! Then you have to trust this peasant. He's also got a mind."

"A wolf didn't eat it up," slyly confirmed Tsipyshev.

"There you are! It's not enough just to teach us—you have to listen to us. But the way things are, everything comes from above, always from above. The plans are handed down from above, chairmen from above, the harvest yield estimate from above. There's no time to persuade people, and it isn't even necessary, it's easier not to. Just hand down directives, in other words, and recommend. They stopped cultural work—it was too much trouble. Clubs and reading rooms function only in reports. There's no one to give lectures and talks. What's left are campaigns for getting things ready and getting things in; five-day, ten-day, monthly deadlines. . . ."

Konoplev stopped for breath and Piotr Kuz'mich took advantage of this to put in a word: "It happens this way, too: the wedge won't go in, so the tree's at fault; as they say, the tree has a rotten spot. Just try and disagree in the district committee. They give you advice, recommendation, and it's not advice, but an order. If you don't carry it out, that means you've slackened the reins. If the kolkhozniks don't agree, that means, it's a political failure."

"But why a failure?" Konoplev almost shouted, "Aren't we concerned at heart with the same cause, do we have different interests?"

"Well, you know, brother, they don't pat the district committee on the head, either, if anything goes wrong. They have to deliver, too, and how!"

"And how, and how!" Konoplev fumed, "Next to us, in the Gruzdikhino district, things are done differently. Shurin came here a few days ago and he says that there the chairmen don't quake in their shoes when the chief calls them up to the district committee. There isn't this fear. The secretary comes to the kolkhoz informally, and talks with people not as though he were carrying out a written directive."

On the shelf in the front corner the radio started up more audibly. It still crackled and hissed like an expiring foam fire extinguisher, but now through the crackling and hissing, instead of music, someone's stammering speech was coming through. Letters from the virgin lands were being transmitted. Some young fellow

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or other was talking about the success of his work in the Altai region. The men at the table listened.

"They call us Muscovites here, although we're from different towns. We stick together, we don't take anything lying down. The harvest last year was out of the world. You walk into the wheat just like into reeds. Even the oldsters don't remember such crops. There weren't enough places to pour the grain, it was rough. . . ."

The young fellow was addressing his dear mamma, but in such a way, as if he had never pronounced this name before. He was obviously intimidated by the microphone.

"Take a look," said Piotr Kuz'mich, "they have their troubles there, too: no place to pour the grain." He poked his arm in the direction of the radio and the tarpaulin raincoat slipped off his armless left shoulder.

"Not everyone, after all, can go to the Altai region," muttered Konoplev and, again taken by coughing, got up from the table, took the pot with the cigarette butts in both hands and went to the doorway. There he pushed aside the broom with his foot and threw the butts into the corner.

And then it was revealed that in the hut, during all the time this talk was going on, one other person had been present. From behind the wide Russian stove there resounded an imperious old lady's voice.

"Where are you throwing things, you old croak? You're not the one who has to sweep. I just washed the floor, and you mess it all up again."

From the unexpectedness of it the men started and exchanged looks.

"You still here, Marfa? What do you want?"

"What I want! I'm keeping watch on you. You set fire to the office and they'll have me in court for it. The broom's dry, and what if suddenly there's a spark, God forbid. . . ."

"You better go home."

"When I have to—I'll go."

The conversation of the friends broke off, as though they felt guilty of something before one another.

For an instant the street became audible, the sound of the wind, girls' singing in the distance.

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Sergei Shchukin turned off the radio, the voices of the virgin land dwellers broke off.

Again they began to tear off pieces of newspaper, pulling it out little by little from under the cracked glass on the table top, and rolling up cigarettes, both plain and twisted into L-shape. . . . They were silent for a long while, smoking. . . . And when they began again to exchange short remarks, these were already idle remarks, not about anything, not meant for anyone. About the weather—the weather was rotten, in such weather your bones ached. About newspapers—there are different kinds; if you roll a cigarette from some, all you get is a bitter taste and there's no tobacco smell. Then there was something said about yesterday—someone had to go somewhere, but didn't go. Then about tomorrow—ought to get up earlier; the old lady has finally got around to making pancakes. . . . Idle words, but they were already uttered in muffled voices, quietly, with a glance around now and then and at the stove, as though behind it were concealed not Marfa, the office cleaning woman, but some sort of outsider, some obscure person with whom one must be on guard. Tsipyshev grew serious, no longer talked, did not smile, only asked about three times, by the way, without addressing anyone in particular, "What's keeping this teacher? We ought to get the Party meeting started."

Only Shchukin suddenly acted a bit strangely. He could not sit still, the stool under him scraped. His eyes—young, impudent, and sharp—shone upon everyone defiantly. It was as though Shchukin suddenly saw something that no one else had yet seen and therefore felt his superiority over the others. Finally, he could not hold back and laughed loudly.

"Boy, that darned dame gave us a scare!" said Shchukin, laughing.

Piotr Kuz'mich and Konoplev exchanged glances and also laughed.

"It's true—the old she-devil. Bellowing all of a sudden from behind the stove. Well, I thought . . ." Ivan Konoplev finished the sentence with difficulty, "Well, I thought the big man himself had come—caught us in the act. . . ."

"We got scared like little boys caught in some one else's cabbage patch."

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Laughter discharged the tension and returned them to their normal state.

"And what are we afraid of, fellows?" Piotr Kuz'mich suddenly said, musingly and a bit sadly, "Why, we're already afraid of ourselves!"

But Tsipyshev did not smile this time either. It was as though he did not notice that Konoplev and Piotr Kuz'mich also had burst into laughter but looked only at Sergei Shchukin—sternly, like an elder.

"You're young still to laugh about this. If you'd lived as long as we have. . . ."

But Shchukin was beyond quieting down. Besides, both Konoplev and Piotr Kuz'mich were obviously on his side. They winked lively at him and kept on laughing.

"That's the way it is. That's how we're afraid," said Konoplev.

Behind the stove Marfa was silent.

Two young fellows of Komsomol age tore into the office.

"Why are you here?" Tsipyshev turned bodily to them.

"We want to listen to the radio."

"You can't. We're about to have a Party meeting."

"Where should we go then? There are a lot of us outside."

"Wherever you want."

Having said this, Tsipyshev looked around at his friends, as though he wanted to find out whether they approved his action.

Piotr Kuz'mich did not approve.

"I'll tell you what, my fine fellows," he said, addressing the boys. "We'll whiz through our Party meeting here, we'll have a talk, and then you can take over command."

Finally, the teacher herself came—Akulina Semenovna, young, short, looking almost like a little girl. She wearily untied and removed her gray wool kerchief from her head and stuck herself away in the corner under the wooden shelf with the radio. With her arrival Tsipyshev also became more lively. But this liveliness took the form of starting to talk to the teacher with exaggerated sternness, like a superior.

"How come, Akulina Semenovna, that you make everyone wait?"

Akulina Semenovna looked guiltily at Tsipyshev, at Piotr Kuz'mich, then at the pot filled with cigarette butts, at the lamp and lowered her eyes.

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"Well, . . we were held up . . . in school. Piotr Kuz'mich," she turned to the one-armed man, "I should like to settle a matter before the meeting. There is no firewood in the school. . . ."

"About business afterward," Tsipyshev interrupted her, "now we have to get through the meeting. The district committee has been requesting a long time now that there be two meetings a month, and we can't even get together to get one on the record. How are we going to account for this?"

Ivan Konoplev sighed audibly at this point and Tsipyshev again for about a moment seemed to feel embarrassment, lack of confidence in himself, and timidly looked around, as though asking to be excused for his words. But all kept silent. Then Tsipyshev's voice finally acquired firmness and authority. What had happened? His beard straightened out, lengthened, his eyes grew hard, in them vanished the live spark that had flickered during the simple friendly conversation. To the cleaning woman, Marfa, Tsipyshev now addressed himself in the tones of a command: "You Marfa, leave! We're going to have a Party meeting here. We're going to talk."

And Marfa—as though she sensed the change that had taken place—did not disobey, did not grumble. She said, "Go ahead and talk. Don't I understand? I'm leaving."

When the door quietly closed after the subdued Marfa, Tsipyshev arose and uttered the very same words that, in such instances, were uttered by the secretary of the party district committee, and even in the same dry, stern, and seemingly conspiratorial voice, in which the secretary of the district committee spoke before the start of a meeting, "Shall we begin, comrades! Are all assembled?"

He said this and it was as if he flicked the switch of some sort of miracle-working mechanism. Everything in the hut began to be transformed beyond recognition—the people, the things, and even, it seemed, the air.

Shchukin and Konoplev noiselessly moved back from the table. Piotr Kuz'mich remained seated where he was, only he gathered up the tarpaulin raincoat that had half fallen from his shoulders and placed it aside on the bench. The teacher, Akulina Semenovna, drew back even more into the corner under the radio. Everyone's face became concentrated, tense, and bored, as though these people had set themselves for something long, long familiar, but, all the same,

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solemn and important. Everything earthly, everything natural disappeared. The action was transferred into another world, into a complex setup, to which these simple, warm people were still not quite accustomed and which they still did not quite understand.

"Are all assembled?" repeated Tsipyshev, surveying those present, as though there were at least several times ten.

But there were now, as we already know, only five in all. The livestock breeder, Stepan Tsipyshev, turned out to be the secretary of the Party organization. He had been elected secretary recently on the recommendation of the district committee. Flattered by this, Tsipyshev tried his best to fulfil his role, and being a novice, he unwittingly began in everything to imitate the "district boss." True, he sometimes dealt ironically with himself, but he nevertheless carried out every directive from above with such zeal and literalness—all from fearfulness of committing some error—that at times it would have been better had he not dotted every last "i." The zonal political instructor of the district committee, who had been present at the election of Tsipyshev, joked that Comrade Tsipyshev had not a few virtues, but he also had shortcomings and that his chief shortcoming was his beard. Tsipyshev took this joke seriously, as a directive, and resolved privately to remove the beard and all other hair from his face, but there had not as yet been an opportune occasion to do so.

Piotr Kuz'mich Kudriavtsev, the one-armed man, turned out to be the chairman of the kolkhoz. Ivan Konoplev, as was already noted, was the brigadier farmer. Sergei Shchukin was the storehouse keeper. From the time that Shchukin was made storehouse keeper and his predecessor struck from the record, as a result of being transferred to work in the kolkhoz shop, there were no rank and file kolkhozniks in the Party organization. Akulina Semenovna—well, she was of the intelligentsia altogether, even though she was a fellow villager and depended in everything on the kolkhoz administration.

"The first to take the floor will be the chairman of our kolkhoz, Comrade Piotr Kuz'mich!"

Piotr Kuz'mich Kudriavtsev got up.

Tsipyshev sat down.

The Party meeting began.

And there began that same thing, about which the members of the Party organization—including the secretary himself—had just

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spoken among themselves with such frankness and insight, inveighing against soulless officialism, bureaucratism, slavish literalness in actions and words.

"Comrades!" said the chairman of the kolkhoz, "the district committee and district executive committee have not confirmed our production plan. I believe that we have not provided for some things and allowed them to take their own course. This is not to our credit. We did not carry on any explanatory activity among the masses and did not persuade them. But people must be persuaded, comrades. You and I are the levers of the Party in the kolkhoz village—this was pointed out to us in the district committee and the district executive committee. . . ."

The teacher, with cautious, stealthy movements of her hands, in order to disturb no one, again tied the kerchief around her head. Her face became hidden from view, and what she was thinking of now, no one could say.

But Shchukin again began to smile. He took from his pocket his lifetime pen, rotated it in his hands, then took out his comb, looked through it at the lamp, softly blew on the teeth and put the comb back, not combing himself after all. His face expanded more and more and in his eyes there appeared a sly, mocking light. It seemed that in just another moment Shchukin would again burst into laughter. But he did not laugh and only nudged Konoplev in the side and whispered to him: "You see, what's going on? Do you recognize him now?"

Konoplev also smiled, but crookedly, without humor.

"All right, now, let him have his say. This is how it has to be. Piotr Kuz'mich is now on his job. The way it is in the district committee, that's the way it is with us. Like master, like man."

"But what about truth."[1]

"Truth—it will have its way. It will soon reach us, too, brother, and it will come like a thunderclap."

"But we'll have reached the end of the rope."

"We won't."

And Konoplev drew up to the table, moved the pot closer and

1. TRANS. NOTE: *Pravda* in Russian may mean either "truth" or "justice." At the beginning of the story "justice" is emphasized. Here the emphasis is on "truth."

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smoked without end. . . . He did not venture to cough, he restrained himself, although everything gurgled and wheezed in his chest.

Kudriavtsev, Piotr Kuz'mich, did not speak long. The essence of his report was that the fighting ability of the Party organization would be placed in doubt by the district committee, if the kolkhoz plan of crop rotation for the next year were not immediately corrected and in unconditional accordance with the directives of the district committee and the district executive committee. All those who took part in the discussion agreed with this. It was not possible otherwise.

In the discussions there took part Akulina Semenovna and Shchukin and Konoplev. No differences of opinion were revealed, just as there had been none during that friendly conversation before the start of the Party meeting. True, the agreement and unanimity now were manifested in a somewhat different, one may say reverse, sense.

Tsipyshev was pleased with the single-mindedness of the Communists and spoke himself on the second question. Somehow, the zonal secretary of the district committee of the Party had directed attention to the fact that political-educational work was not set in progress in the kolkhoz and reported about the pertinent facts in a memorandum to the first secretary of the district committee.

"The best people, comrades, are not encouraged by us," said Tsipyshev in this connection, "the laggards are not punished, there's no competition. You've only to take a look at our red-black board—the picture is clear. We have to lead the masses, comrades! I think we ought to do as follows: Specify several kolkhoz units to receive a bonus, pick one or two persons for this purpose in each unit—and penalize some others, so it should be right on both sides. They'll approve of our action in the regional committee."

The meeting unanimously resolved to single out five persons for a bonus, three for a penalty. Conversation arose only on the subject: in which kolkhoz units people should be found for encouragement, in which for punishment.

They had no time to write even one resolution—Marfa returned, in order to clean up and lock the office. Piotr Kuz'mich proposed that the drawing up of the resolution be entrusted to the Party secretary.

"You write you know what," he whispered, pleased that the

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meeting had come to an end, "In conditions of heightened enthusiasm and will to work there is proceeding full scale ahead throughout the kolkhoz. . . ."

"Throughout the country . . ." prompted Shchukin.

They got ready quietly to go home, and it was as though everyone in his heart had a sense of fulfilled obligation and at the same time of embarrassment, dissatisfaction with self. But on the threshold boots were already clomping, the young people appeared in the doorway.

"Did we come on time?" asked one of the two young fellows, who had already come into the office.

"On time!" answered Piotr Kuz'mich, "Just the right time. Come in, all of you."

Into the hut burst the cool air from the street. The flame in the lamp revived, stools were moved around, windows opened.

"You sure have smoke in here!" the girls clamored.

With the appearance of the young people, Akulina Semenovna straightened up, pulled the kerchief from her head. These were people of her own age, she felt freer with them. Sergei Shchukin also began to hop around, pulled his necktie tighter and was already inseparable from the girls.

The radio, which had been turned on, suddenly spoke out loud and clear. Reports on the preparation for the Twentieth Party Congress were being broadcast. Everyone listened to this message.

Piotr Kuz'mich, as though grown softer, before leaving said to Akulina Semenovna, "There'll be firewood, don't worry, I'll see to it." But Tsipyshev went over to Sergei Shchukin and squeezed his arm above the elbow, "You're staying here?"

"Yes."

"Well, see to it that there shouldn't be anything, you know. . . ."

When the chairman of the kolkhoz Kudriavtsev and the farmer Ivan Konoplev walked from the office down the dark, dirty street, there started up again the conversation about life, about conditions, about work—the very same that went on before the meeting.

"Let's see now what the Twentieth Congress will say!" they repeated from time to time. And again these were plain, warm, straightforward people—people, and not levers.

(*Translated from the Russian by Miriam B. London*)

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G. L. Arnold

THE POLITICS OF 1970*

The title chosen for this essay accords in at least one respect with a forecast now frequently made by official and private study groups: it assumes that by 1970 the technological revolution under way since 1945 will have brought about a drastic rearrangement of the military and political institutions inherited from the preceding era. This is the burden of a report recently published on behalf of the National Planning Association, under the suggestive title "1970 Without Arms Control." From this document one may learn, e.g., that during the coming decade the world will gradually traverse the somewhat indeterminate stage of military technology with which statesmen and scientists are presently struggling; we shall then have attained a higher level, with rockets taking the place of aircraft, and at most fifteen minutes warning of impending attack by enemy missiles. Note that by then the major powers are expected to have developed automatic retaliation systems capable of going into action even if there is no one alive to press the button, or indeed to benefit from its use. In the words of the report, "it is a disturbing fact that while weapons grow increasingly effective, they also tend to outgrow previous control possibilities." "Plans for a control that works in one stage of technology will be rendered useless by later developments." As for the chances of voluntary assent to effective international control on the part of the powers, the report does not rate them very highly.

Notwithstanding the gloomy tone of these and similar predictions, the general public continues to manifest a marked degree of stoicism. This is probably due as much to indifference as to helplessness in the face of increasingly alarming statements now uttered with growing frequency by reputable scientists and others in authority. The element of

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simple common sense embedded in this widespread scepticism should not be underestimated—the common man is not merely understandably reluctant to contemplate the possible dissolution of his familiar world; he is also sufficiently toughminded to discount some of the more extravagant fears of his guilt-ridden intellectual betters. It is nonetheless apparent that we are nearing the close of the transitional period between the Second World War and the attainment of a new technological level unperceived in 1939 or even in 1945. Whether new wars can and will be fought on this level, before mankind achieves an adequate degree of control over the new means of destruction, is a question so much debated now that it becomes difficult to think of anything new to say. When heads of government take to writing letters to the press, in an effort to persuade the uncommitted that they stand for disarmament (unlike the opposing side, which presumably favors all-round suicide), the political scientist is driven back upon higher ground. If he cannot find a fresh vantage point, his occupation vanishes, as does confidence in his ability to discern those elements in the situation that are hidden from statesmen and diplomatists. The question, in short, is whether in all this welter of public and private comment on the world situation, there is still room for what used to be known as theoretical thinking.

Fortunately the answer is yes. This is not to say that such thinking will necessarily yield results not available to common sense. What is intended here is not a refutation of commonsensical reflection, but a grounding of such reflection in something more systematic and less subject to constant revision under pressure of events. Such revision is prompted by failure to relate political events to structural conditions. One such failure, to take an instance out of many, occurred in 1956-57, in connection with certain misjudgments of the situation in China, after Mao Tse-tung had delighted the unwary with his "Hundred Flowers" speech. It could then have been foreseen—and was in fact foreseen by the Yugoslav Communists—that despite such superficial symptoms of liberalization, China would turn out to be the last great bulwark of unreconstructed Stalinism: a circumstance which today hardly needs emphasis. Yet in 1956 and 1957 there were those who, on the evidence of what they saw in the newspapers, were ready to cast theoretical thinking to the winds and take their stand (as they supposed) on the plain evidence of their senses and the concurrent judgment of the well-informed.

At the moment such excessive reliance on political expertise, and the related indifference to the kind of thinking that concerns itself with long-term processes, is more in evidence where Europe is concerned.

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We have become so used to discussing European affairs in terms of military disengagement, German unification, and so forth, that there is a tendency to overlook the less dramatic but ultimately more important structural changes which have been going on since 1945, on both sides of the Iron Curtain. One discerns a certain reluctance in official and other quarters to concede that Eastern Europe may in some sense have to remain part of what the Kremlin calls "the camp of socialism," even if the Russian occupation armies should be withdrawn. There is hope—based, it seems, on little except wishful thinking—that the Poland of Gromulka will eventually follow the example of Tito's Yugoslavia. A similar lag in official thinking inclines the policy-makers to discuss European affairs as though countries like Britain, France, or West Germany still mattered in the way they did before 1939. At the same time their basic stability tends to be underrated. The fact is that despite some superficial evidence to the contrary, West European politics tend increasingly to be of the municipal kind. By 1970, when economic unification may be expected to have reached its goal, at any rate on the continent, the various national legislatures are unlikely to be able to harm the interests of their respective countries in any domain that really matters, though they will doubtless continue to reflect popular passions on the subject, e.g., of financial support for church schools. In brief, the European nation-states tend to lose ground politically as they become more democratic and at the same time less sovereign. This process does not necessarily enhance the safety of the whole area—in a major war waged with nuclear weapons all Europeans will simply have to rely on their luck; but it does indicate that such a world disaster is unlikely to be triggered by purely European events.

This way of looking at the situation naturally goes counter to much excited talk about present and future upheavals—an alarmist state of mind currently fed by events in France, where the North African war threw too heavy a strain on the shaky institutions of the Fourth Republic. Like Spain and Italy, though in a minor degree, France is still liable to suffer political upheavals of the classical type which in a fully integrated and democratized Western Europe are unlikely to recur. In this respect, too, the present phase is transitional. One need only compare the French situation with that in politically stable north-western Europe on the one hand, and with the perennially troubled Iberian peninsula on the other, to grasp the importance of those social changes which are gradually transforming the whole of Western Europe in such a manner as to preclude political breakdowns and revolutions of the classical type. The process is not uniform, but despite occasional violent

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interruptions, it is both effective and irreversible. Post-Hitler Germany is the clearest possible evidence of what happens to a country when it has finally become thoroughly bourgeois. The wave of pacifism and "neutralism" which so disturbs American diplomacy at the present time is basically an aspect of this fundamental shift towards democracy and reasonableness. Whatever its present connection with alarm over the danger of nuclear war, it is at bottom a long-term reorientation on the part of countries which have contracted out of world politics, or are in process of doing so. The smaller democratic countries of northern Europe—Scandinavia, Holland, Switzerland—have long been in the van of this secular movement. Britain, Germany, and France—until yesterday great powers—are about to follow suit, though not without difficulty and internal stresses, rising in the case of France to a sudden dramatic pitch. From the outsider's viewpoint, there is little here to cause a rush of blood, or even of ideology, to the head. It was never very likely that medium-sized, democratically governed (on the whole) countries would retain their former outlook in an age in which even the two super-powers are having difficulty with the growth of their arms budgets. Sputniks and ICBM's are for those who can afford them. The countries of Western (and of Eastern) Europe are not among that number, though one or the other may now and then let off a Hiroshima-type bomb for prestige purposes. In this respect, too, the politics of 1970 are clearly going to be of a very different type from those of 1939, not to mention 1914, when the terms "great power" and "European power" were very nearly synonymous.

If one looks beyond Western Europe, to the regions which were once the chosen field of European expansion, the conclusion is similar. It is becoming increasingly difficult to arraign European "capitalism and imperialism," though doubtless the various Communist and/or nationalist movements in the backward countries will for a while persist in this routine, from sheer force of habit. For European expansion, political and economic, is now very much a thing of the past. Here and there a rearguard action is still being fought, the most spectacular at the moment taking place in North Africa; but in general Western European society may now be said to have effected the great withdrawal and turned in upon itself. The expulsion of the European powers from Asia is well-nigh complete; the Middle East and North Africa have pretty nearly achieved the corresponding objective; and Africa south of the Sahara is not far behind. What this is going to mean in terms of economic development remains for the moment an open question, but one thing is already certain: the bulk of foreign investment will not

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in future be European, though Britain and France still invest heavily in Africa, and some profits are being ploughed back into Middle Eastern oil. No major West European country is likely in the foreseeable future to stake an economic claim comparable to the pre-1939 foreign holdings of Britain, France, or Holland. The old certainties are gone, political risks have mounted, and democratic pressures in the industrial countries work in the direction of letting both investment and charity commence at home. Socialist economics favor the domestic consumer, and most West European countries are now semi-socialist and likely to go further in that direction. Moreover, the global economic pull reinforces these social trends. To quote from an author who has made a professional study of the subject:

"Western Europe has failed since 1945 to attain more than a precarious satisfaction of the economic demands of its own people. This failure is the more striking since output has risen much faster than in the United States. Europe nevertheless preserved a net dependence on dollar aid and could not provide capital of its own for the risky venture of investment in the poorest countries—or where it could, as in Germany, there was more profit in investing at home. It is a fact of the first importance that the United States has no real Western European partner in the economic development of the poorest countries. What Communism may in the future be able to extract from its subjects without asking for their consent, the richer Western European peoples could not provide with democratic goodwill." (Oscar Gass, "The United States and the Poorest Peoples," *Commentary,* February 1958.)

This is so true and so important that one wonders why it is not being said more often. Perhaps it is thought impolitic to draw the attention of the American public to the fact that the United States has no major helpers in the work of building an international economy outside the Soviet system. (To say nothing of the need to spare the sensitive feelings of people in Europe who still fancy themselves equal partners in this task.) It is difficult enough (one can hear the experts telling each other) having to persuade people that America must trade with other Western countries. If in addition they are also told that it is up to the United States to finance the bulk of economic development in the backward regions of the globe—those that the Communists have not taken over, that is—the public mood may become unduly despondent. But how long can the secret be kept? After all, even the present administration has had to ask for additional global investment funds, and all Mr. Kennan's admonitions to take a firm line with ex-colonial countries cannot quite blot out the awkward fact that when these countries describe their position as critical, they are merely stating the obvious.

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There is of course something to be said for discouraging mere political blackmail. Not every dictator who threatens to go Communist if he is not given atomic weapons to play with need be taken at his word; there are instances where a firm refusal to be rattled will have a beneficial effect. But by and large this is not the issue. The basic challenge comes from societies in the transitional stage between agrarian stagnation and industrial progress. This is now almost a commonplace. What is not so well understood is the political mechanism whereby these societies effect the transition. Here one still comes across evidence of the old uncritical worship of mere progress and the ideologies instrumental thereto. The underlying assumptions tend to be a triflè on the optimistic side. Where motives are imputed they are generally of the nobler sort. Thus in an otherwise hardheaded and professional discussion of the topic by two well-known authors, published in a recent issue of a highly regarded quarterly, there occurs the following characteristic passage:

"Both historically and at present the building of modern economies and centralized modern governments has been driven along less by the profit motive than by the aspirations for increased national and human dignity. Merchants and the profit motive played their part in the modernization efforts of Bismarck's Germany, Meiji Japan, Witte's Russia and Ataturk's Turkey; but soldiers, civil servants and nationalism were the most powerful agents. And so it is today in Asia, the Middle East and Africa." (M. F. Millikan and W. W. Rostow, "Foreign Aid: Next Phase", *Foreign Affairs,* April 1958.)

A reflection which comes to mind upon reading this instructive passage is that the authors seem to have imbibed something of the anti-bourgeois ideology characteristic of the countries in question at the moment when they made the transition to the modern world: at any rate the distinction between sordid commercialism and patriotic idealism is in the best nineteenth-century Prussian or Japanese tradition. Oddly enough it was this very emphasis on the superiority of their respective national ideologies over the Western bourgeois mentality which subsequently led the rulers of these societies astray, with results fatal to their plans. What after all has become of Bismarck's Germany and Meiji Japan, not to mention the Russia which Count Witte tried so industriously (and ineffectively) to modernize without touching its central political institutions? And if the future of the Turkish Republic looks somewhat more promising, may this not be due to the fact that it owes its origin to a revolution? In principle Mr. Millikan and Mr. Rostow would not of course deny this, but a certain facile optimism keeps breaking through; witness the following passage:

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"If the local political leader concentrates merely on consolidating his central power or on rallying his people around an external objective, he may well achieve short-run success; but he will not meet the demand for economic and social progress pressing up steadily from the grass-roots. He runs the longer-run risk of creating a centralized state without a viable political basis; or of exhausting his popular mandate in efforts to assert the sovereignty and power of the new nation against the external world, efforts which fail to satisfy his people's rising expectations for material advance. To be successful, a politician in a transitional society must, in the end, link nationalist fervor and the new centralized state to programs of economic and social substance.

I submit with all due deference that this is at once too general and too optimistic. There lurks behind it what Marx called the liberal illusion—the illusion that all interests are ultimately in harmony. The fact is that all interests are *not* in harmony. What is called the national interest may be partly or wholly at variance with other important interests, including the interest of world peace. I take the passage I have just quoted to constitute a polite hint in the direction of Colonel Nasser, but to be realistic it would have to be more outspoken. Is it really, to take an obvious example, in the interest of the world that so important an international shipping lane as the Suez Canal should be at the mercy of an uncontrolled military dictatorship? Or that a strategically located country should be governed by adventurers without a mandate other than their own highly dubious interpretation of what is called the general will? These things happen, and it is useless to deplore them, but one should at least be clear about the consequences. And why introduce the term "grass-roots," which inevitably conjures up a quite misleading picture of the relationship between government and the governed in societies with an unbroken tradition of despotism, reaching back in some cases three thousand years or more? There is very little grass in Egypt, and no political roots to speak of, and the same is true of most other Asian and African countries. And it has to be remembered that even in such areas as Italy and the Iberian peninsula, which are better placed in this respect, home grown dictatorships have lasted for decades, despite their signal failure to develop "programs of economic and social substance."

Again, how does such a terminology enable one to draw meaningful distinctions between the Turkey of Kemal, the Egypt of Nasser, the Yugoslavia of Tito, and the Poland of Gomulka, not to mention the Italy of Mussolini or the Spain of Franco? These regimes evidently have, or had, something in common, and that something is presumably related to an underlying socio-economic constellation, to which the

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term "backwardness" is more or less appropriate. But if one goes further to inquire what precisely constitutes the distinguishing mark of Kemalism, Nasserism, Titoism, Fascism, or the unorthodox Leninism of Comrade Gomulka, one begins to see that there are structural factors at work which favor one solution rather than the other; whatever may happen in Egypt or Spain or Poland tomorrow, neither country is likely to evolve political institutions of the Western type, or for that matter a tradition of liberal nonconformism in thought. Yet it is precisely at this level that the decisive political choices are made. Mussolini's rise would not have been possible without the evolution of Italian nationalism, and this evolution in turn was promoted by the decline of European liberalism after the first world war; to say nothing of Hitler, and the impact of that catastrophe on the political destinies of half the world.

At this point it becomes even less possible to stay out of controversy. Nowadays we are often told that nationalism is the principal agent of modernization in backward countries, but there is no indication as to what kind of nationalism is likely to become predominant in them, except of course that everyone hopes it won't be the kind that won out in China. The issue is customarily presented in a somewhat simplified manner, the opposing parties being labelled "Nationalist" and "Communist," as though it went without saying that these are mutually exclusive terms, whereas the Chinese experience should have taught us that this is not so. There is indeed a growing awareness that the failure of what should perhaps be called "classical" nationalism may open the way to a second, Communist-led, wave of the revolution, and the authors just quoted show some grasp of this fact when they remark: "There is little doubt that Moscow and Peking regard Nasser, Nehru, Soekarno and the other non-Communist leaders of the new nations as the Chiang Kai-sheks of the future." But it is not made sufficiently clear that the Communists expect to win this struggle under the nationalist banner, and not as representatives of some mythical "proletarian internationalism" that went out of fashion a long time ago. At most it is conceded that they may try to deceive people into regarding them as authentic patriots; but where is the deception? Mao Tse-tung is as genuine a representative of Chinese nationalism as Chiang Kai-shek. It really is time to dispense with slogans that bear no relation to any observable reality. There is no such thing as "international Communism," or at any rate it is no more international than the rival ideology of Western liberalism. There are two global camps, or parties—for convenience's sake they might be designated "the American party" and "the Russian party," just as in the Napoleonic age, people in

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Europe quite naturally referred to "the English party" and "the French party", meaning the two contesting camps which were then at grips all over the world. Most countries now group themselves under the somewhat tattered banners of liberalism and Communism, and in so doing they automatically qualify for membership of either of the two "camps" now contending for mastery of the globe. What all this has to do with "maneuver" or "deception", it is hard to understand.

The chief intellectual fault in this respect lies in the failure to perceive that nationalism can take many forms. There is no such thing as "pure" nationalism. The nationalism of the *Risorgimento* was liberal, because liberalism happened to be in the ascendant in mid-nineteenth-century Europe; half a century later, many of the descendants of these liberal nationalists turned fascist and followed Mussolini. Germany in the twentieth century supplies evidence of the same process in a more disastrous form. The nationalism of France is profoundly marked by the Jacobin tradition of the Revolution. Modern Russian or Chinese nationalism represents a synthesis of native patriotism and Leninist ideology. No one can say with any certainty what the future holds in store for the Indian sub-continent and the Islamic world, but by a process of elimination one may easily reach the not very surprising conclusion that *their* national evolution will either be democratic or anti-democratic, and if the latter, probably Communist. This, however, is not the same as to say that they are having to choose between nationalism "or" Communism. The notion of such a choice exists only in the minds of people who have failed to think seriously about the matter. There is of course also the possibility that the countries in question will turn away from the threshold of modernity and retain their currently prevailing conservative and religious outlook; in other words, abandon the attempt to modernize as hopeless and remain content with the role of onlookers. But this choice is not a likely one, and in any case it is not one that the West can afford to promote. If we were to adopt the attitude that the problem presented by these countries is probably hopeless, and in any case none of our business, it is only too clear what the result would be. Whether or not one agrees with Mr. Kennan that morally speaking we owe these people nothing, it is pretty obvious that to them the situation presents itself in an entirely different light.

It is undoubtedly tempting to decree that the economic problem facing the countries in question is too big to be solved in this generation. Specifically, that no government—or at any rate no popularly controlled government—can cope with the task of simultaneously raising output and holding down the birthrate. Recent figures show that

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since about the time of the First World War, in contrast to earlier periods, the industrial countries have been exhibiting a slower rate of population growth than the undeveloped areas as a whole, the lead among the latter incidentally being held by Latin America, at least percentage-wise: in absolute figures, China is the biggest bloc, with an official count of over 600 million and every prospect of reaching the billion mark before the end of the century. By the same date, according to some recent computations, the total population of the Western hemisphere, north and south, will grow from some 400 million in 1960 to some 900 million in 2000. (Cf. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* March 1958.) Taking a somewhat earlier and less speculative date, the Population Branch of the United Nations estimates that between 1960 and 1975 the population of North America will rise from 197 million to 240 million, that of Latin America from 206 million to 304 million, Europe (outside Russia) merely from 424 million to 476 million, and Asia by contrast from 1,620 million to 2,210 million. It is the latter figure, plus that for Latin America, which now holds the attention of political scientists. There is little doubt that Europe and North America will maintain their secular march towards a steadily mounting level of well-being, though within eastern and southern Europe there are regions where progress may be slow. Latin America presents a less hopeful picture, and when one comes to Asia and Africa it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what is now happening in these regions is largely the inevitable, though long delayed, consequence of steadily rising population pressure upon inadequate resources. Some Asian countries, notably Japan, have managed the transition to industrialism so as to expand their resources just in time to catch up with population growth and even surpass it; others have not been so lucky. In particular, China, India and Egypt have been caught by the "population explosion" at a very awkward stage in their economic development, and although one would like to dissent from crude anti-imperialism of the Moscow-Peking variety, it is undeniable that India and Egypt have (to put it mildly) not been helped by the kind of political and economic regime that went with foreign domination.

The battle is not yet lost, but if India, the Middle East, and North Africa are to retain their links with the Western world, we shall have to bestir ourselves. This is not to suggest that the backward countries can in this century be brought up to Western standards of living. Such an expectation is unrealistic. Western Europe and North America have headed the parade for a very long time, and by now they are too far

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advanced for comparisons with other regions to be meaningful. A recent economic forecast suggests that if the long-term rate of growth in the United States since 1880 is maintained in future, then by 1975 the gross national product will exceed $725 billion, compared with $415 billion in 1956, which would mean that by 1975 the disposable income of the average family (after taxes) would be in excess of $7,000, as against some $5,300 at present. (Report published by the Committee for Economic Development, February 1958.) Such forecasts bear no relation to the problems of the undeveloped countries, i.e., those that have not yet made the transition to an industrial economy. Not only is the gap between advanced and backward countries, between the rich and the poor, steadily widening, but their affairs are on altogether different levels. In the backward countries the question is not how to raise consumption standards, but how to make the initial investment that will spark the process of self-sustaining advance across the threshold of stagnation and growing misery. And the overriding political problem is whether this can be done democratically; as to which a certain degree of scepticism is legitimate. To put it simply: can peasant electorates be expected to support policies which boil down to financing the growth of industry, while the income of all other groups of society is either artificially held down or at any rate not substantially increased? And if the electorates fail to sanction such policies, can some form of dictatorship be avoided? And given the choice between the various brands of authoritarianism, are not the Communists remarkably well placed to win this particular race?

There is no definite answer to such questions, but it is in these terms, more or less, that the issue presents itself to the political and intellectual elites in the backward countries, which is another way of saying that the politics of 1970 are going to be significantly different from those of the liberal era. In retrospect it is clear now that since 1914 the liberal experiment has shown signs of flagging outside the Western world (properly so called)—the world of Western Europe and North America. Whether the march can be resumed, and if so under what banner and in what sort of symbiosis with democratic forms of socialism, no one can say. It is unwise to encourage optimism on this score. We are on the defensive, and likely to stay there for a long time to come, no matter how many summit conferences are held, or how many steps are taken to improve the apparatus of policy and propaganda. What is called the Cold War is essentially a struggle for political control over the uncommitted areas of the world. In this struggle, the Western camp and the Sino-Soviet bloc will continue to deploy a variety of tech-

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niques with a view to shifting the world balance of power without open resort to war. That is all, and it is quite enough to keep us occupied for many years to come. Ultimately it may be possible to resolve some of the purely political problems at a higher level; if, that is to say, there is no world war with nuclear weapons. But even if this particular nightmare can be got out of the way, the world of 1970 will still be very different from that of 1945.

For the politics of 1970 are the politics of a situation in which the uncommitted countries will have to choose between two alternative ways of solving their basic problem. It may be as well to recognize that the Communist alternative is a genuine one, in the sense that it offers a political and economic model that is attractive to the governing elites of undeveloped countries. It may also be helpful to realize that the United States is a conservative power at grips with a revolutionary rival; there is nothing to be gained by trying to mask this fact. Talk of "permanent revolution" sounds silly coming from apologists of an institutional setup which even by Western democratic standards is fairly conservative. The West does not in this age stand for a radical reconstruction of society. We cannot offer sweeping solutions or drastic rearrangements that take no account of individual liberties, and people or nations who want to make *tabula rasa* of all existing institutions should be frankly advised to take their troubles to the rival firm—though with a caution that they will be fortunate if they emerge from the experience with a whole skin: not perhaps a very inspiring or heroic stance, but one that is in accordance with the realities of the situation in which we find ourselves.

I trust that these remarks—notably the foregoing—will be thought permissible in a visitor from Europe who at times finds himself wondering whether his hosts are aware how old-fashioned the United States looks to the rest of the world in this troubled era. It is odd that so conservative a country—I speak of social attitudes and institutions, not of technology—should at times encourage a pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric in its public representatives, while clinging to mid-Victorian ideas and values in its actual way of life. There is no disgrace in being on the conservative side, and it is probable that we should all be better off if the United States recognized its true function in this era as being somewhat similar to that of England during and after the Napoleonic age. At any rate it is pretty obvious that in the present world cleavage it is the USSR which attracts the forces of radicalism, while all the upholders of tradition—from the Vatican to Arab kings and Moslem dignitaries—gravitate towards this country. One has the impression that

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this state of affairs is irritating and embarrassing not only to liberals like Mr. Stevenson, but also to the State Department; and indeed it must be painful to the inheritors of a republican tradition to have to make do with King Saud, while Colonel Nasser betakes himself to Moscow; or to be stuck with General Franco and President Trujillo, while their democratic opponents drift into neutralism or outright despair. Within limits this process can doubtless be reversed. It should not be impossible to develop a settled policy of supporting democratic, left-of-center forces in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, to the exclusion of Communists and reactionaries alike. But it had better be recognized that such forces are weak or even nonexistent in some important areas of political conflict. And even where they possess adequate strength they cannot, in the nature of the case, promise the kind of sweeping solution which goes with the totalitarian reconstruction of society. One may hazard the guess (supported by recent events in Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia) that *after* this reconstruction has been attempted (and partly failed), democracy will once more appear a worthwhile cause to disillusioned revolutionaries, always provided it has not in the meantime been discredited by being identified with what is comically known as "free enterprise." There are probably more liberals in present day Poland than there ever were before in the history of that country. But Poland partakes of the Western tradition. It is by no means certain that the average Soviet citizen yearns for liberal democracy, and one may be sure that in China they hardly know what the term signifies. It is not even, *horribile dictu,* altogether probable that liberal institutions would work in these countries if tried. Perhaps we shall all have to become a little less doctrinaire in prescribing solutions for all sorts of trouble spots.

In conclusion I feel some tribute should be paid to Mr. George Kennan's fundamental insight by someone who, unlike him, is not a new-fangled conservative but an old-fashioned radical. One may disagree with Mr. Kennan on a good many points, but one must surely subscribe to what I take to be his basic conviction: that we ought not to crusade against a phantom called "Communism" (where indeed would that leave Mr. Gomulka?), but rather concentrate on defending Western society against *all* the dangers that threaten it, including the danger of being dragged into a thermo-nuclear war by panicky statesmen and trigger-happy rear generals. If this threat can be averted, the politics of 1970 will still present a sufficiency of difficult, perhaps even insoluble. problems; but at least we shall not have to expect catastrophe every morning. If our opponents wish to conduct ideological crusades, that

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is their affair; one may hope that in time they will get tired of it, but in order to induce the proper frame of mind in them it is essential that we should abstain from following their example. We are conducting a holding operation, not trying to impose some set of fixed values or preconceived ideas upon the world. The defense of a free and pluralist society is not compatible with ideological fanaticism.

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REPORT FROM THE ACADEMY

THE MEZZANINE

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
che la diritta via era smarrita. . . .

I understand that the Modern Language Association met this year in a place called Madison, Wisconsin, during a month called September. I did not attend; that isn't the MLA that I know. Do they have a Statler Hotel in Madison? If so, did that Statler have a Christmas tree in the lobby? Obviously not—September isn't Christmas. But did that Statler have a Mezzanine? Of course it did. The MLA only exists on the Mezzanine.

I attended last year's MLA convention. It was held at the Statler in Washington, but once I came into those crowded corridors it didn't matter what city I was in. I was in the city which can only be called the Mezzanine—the middle place, suspended in air above the lobby of the Statler in Boston or the Palmer House in Chicago or the Ambassador in New York, and when I walked up that carpeted short flight I came back into the place where I had left myself a year before. For the life of the Mezzanine is like the life of the Meson: it exists both intermittently and continuously; between Christmas and Christmas it ceases to be, and yet it is always there. It survives, it is a form of life, and like other forms of life it is compounded of flux and fixity. It changes in place (Chicago, Boston, Washington), but its Place is ever the same (the Mezzanine); it changes in time (1953, 1954, 1955), but its Time has been ever the same (Christmas).

The Mezzanine exists in the Hotel. The Hotel is an organism too; single examples are different from each other, but together they partake of a corporate life which transcends any one of them. The Hotel has a Lobby: rugs, columns, sofas, registration desk, men's shop, green plants, telephone booths, bellboys. The business world flows slowly through its of elevator doors. It is difficult to retain identity in the Lobby; when veins, eddying among the columns and forming stagnant pools in front a man walks through the revolving doors and is confronted by the jumbo

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Christmas tree, his personal Christmas becomes entirely lost. For this is a tree which is a depersonalization of the Christmas tree itself. No ornament upon it can have a personal meaning for anybody. It has no defective bulbs, no cracked old reindeer or chipped Santa Claus inherited from anybody's childhood. It stands in a winter of tinsel, more tinsel than any single human being could hang on a tree in a lifetime of Christmases, and the electric star at its top is farther from human reach than the star that guided the wise men. The tree is not lop-sided; it has no missing branches, no bare places, no cracked limbs; it does not shed its needles. It did not fall over three times when father and mother tried to stand it up. No, it was placed there by the Management and decorated by an I.B.M. machine, and it will disappear the day after New Year's, as conveniently as it came.

Everybody in the Lobby is as well-dressed as the Christmas tree, or as the Lobby itself. There is an air of rich sobriety; the predominant color is a light golden brown, or tan; even the light falling across the deep rugs is tan. The winter sky outdoors is grey, but the light in the Hotel normalizes all seasons. Men choose their suits so as not to clash with these surroundings; there are no outrageous neckties or absurd haircuts, and only the finest footwear sinks in the golden brown rug. The women harmonize even more subtly with their surroundings. Though their clothing varies enormously in color and cut, it is all designed to make them look about the same age, and you see their eyes striving in varying degrees of despair to match the youth of their dresses or the vitality of their perfume. The bellboys are of athletic cast and lower-class speech; but the desk clerks are refined beyond physical desire and are more superb than any client, just as the tree in the Lobby is more superb than Christmas.

The Mezzanine exists in the context of the Hotel as the pre-conscious exists in the context of the conscious, portraying in dream-allegories the racial (or at least the professorial) unconscious. I am fond of telling my students that the Ancient Mariner is present at every wedding-feast; he is likewise present at every birth and every death and every convention. I used to look with contempt on people who attended conventions and wore square white tags with their names in large type. I used to think that this could only have meaning for people whose lives lacked meaning, that they were participating in an artificial ritual because family life, church life, intellectual life, life in the woods, any other kind of life, had ceased to exist in America. This is not so. A man's profession is not a mere appendage to life, and ought not to be. It ought to be just as full of meaning and have just as much connection with eternity as any of his other activities. The convention is the ritual

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of his profession; it puts his activities in perspective with the activities of his colleagues, and his past in perspective with his present. It teaches him where he stands in the world of his peers and where he stands in the history of himself. For in that permanent world outside time and place he meets precisely himself; the convention becomes a commentary on his life, as much as a painting by Brueghel or a poem by Coleridge. For the Ancient Mariner even has something to say to professors of English; perhaps he can also communicate with dentists, dress designers, and Battery B of the 101st Artillery.

When I arrived at last year's convention, almost a whole day late, it was nearly four in the afternoon and I was only conscious enough of the Hotel to be able to find my way by the laws of Hotel architecture to the Mezzanine floor. I recognized it. It is a long, wide corridor, roughly U-shaped, with rooms of various sizes opening on it. In these rooms there are numerous meetings going on simultaneously. The back of any room, where it joins the corridor, is perpetually in turmoil; it is the place of synaesthesia, where dreams blend into one another. As one moves toward the front of the room among the scholars seated there, things grow gradually quiet until, when we have reached the speaker's lectern, we can hear a voice reading a paper in the still point at the center, a paper on Chaucer or Romanticism, or The Novel, stirring only a little life in the anaesthesia of the audience. We are not here concerned with the serious business of scholarship; we are seeking Brueghel and Coleridge, and to find them we must return to the corridor. No matter what is going on in the rooms, the corridor continues to seethe with life, like the life in a bog, low but persistent.

There I saw a vast canvas by Brueghel. I stood at the head of the stairs, looking at his painting, *The Mezzanine*—a cross between *The Country Wedding* and *The Fall of Icarus*. Dominating the scene was a great figure, not of a ploughman, but of the Chairman of the English Department of a great state university. As the soil had shaped the body and personality of the ploughman, so university life and power politics had shaped the Chairman. Life had twisted and bent the ploughman, but it had padded the Chairman. It had weathered and browned the ploughman's face, but it had rounded the Chairman's cheeks and smoothed his brow. The ploughman was done in the browns of the earth, the Chairman in the tans of the Hotel. The ploughman bent over his plough, behind it, slave to it and unaware of everything else; but the Chairman walked ahead, while a plough of assistants and underlings supported him in his condition of state. Like the ploughman, he did not see Icarus falling into the sea.

The Chairman and his group resounded like a major chord in the

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center of the composition, its overtones dying away in a serpentine line of assistant professors. In *The Fall of Icarus* the serpentine line is, of course, composed of sheep. Slightly ahead of the Chairman, clearing a path for him, walked his Executive Officer, like the ploughman's ox, a stouter, less imaginative version of the ploughman. The Executive Officer held a notebook and was checking off names while the Chairman watched the antics of his pencil with detached amusement. Close behind them walked one of his professors, wistful, with a face like a shepherd's, though he had the splotchy red skin and timid steps of a man with a bad heart. They went in a double line: the Chairman with his Executive Officer, the professor with an associate professor who would inherit his courses when he died. The associate professor was taller, healthier, and duller than the professor. He had a surer hold on life, but he walked with the air of a man who cannot understand what has happened to him. He had too many children, too many hours of teaching, too many unfinished research projects, and not enough money to live on. Eventually he would inherit both the professorship and the bad heart. But as the line wound out into the amorphous background, it included men with less hope and confidence than these; in that serpentine line trailing down to the sea there were assistant professors with little prospect of promotion, instructors who had not published enough and were therefore about to be fired, graduate assistants hovering desperately under the Chairman's protection, though he only half remembered their names. And there was no certain point at which the main group came to an end. It blended into the crowd. It lost itself among those with no hopes whatever, no talent and no prospect. The tail of the serpentine line touched the underworld of the Mezzanine; it sank in the surface of the watery background of faces, and it was there that I saw Icarus drowning.

In the departmental procession, nearly everybody wore glasses, but not the Chairman. The Executive Officer peered through thick ground lenses; the professor wore pince-nez on a black ribbon; the associate professor wore horn-rimmed glasses repaired with adhesive tape. But the Chairman looked benignly through dark little eyes comfortably set in smooth pink fat. He was taller than the rest, pleasanter, more famous, more untiring, still young and ambitious, a man without apparent defect. Though he was unmarried and seemed to have no friends, no one could say he was lonely. A deep enough devotion can overcome any amount of loneliness, and energy can take the place of love. Though he did not understand people he had a thorough knowledge of books. It is an excellent quality in an administrator that he not understand people;

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understanding can lead to paralysis, and it can lead to self-understanding, which is even more paralyzing. The ploughman of the MLA, turning up the soil of other men's imaginations, judged not people but Production. The system worked marvelously well.

In a moment that group had dissolved, and others were taking its place; but not before I saw Icarus. Icarus stood against the wall, lighted by indirect lighting which glowed against the plaster round his head, like the water in which he was drowning. He was already madder than the rest, the ultimate isolated figure. His eyes never had focused quite well, in spite of the glasses he wore, and now they seemed unable to focus on the procession before his eyes. He thus seemed to be looking through the Mezzanine, rather than at it, as though the whole scene were as transparent and as dark as the sea. I had seen him at many conventions, and each time he wore a tag with the name of a different school on it. He was not over thirty, a little man with delicate bones and a non-Anglo-Saxon name. He was thin as a sparrow and could never have flown very near the sun, even at his best. His face was comic, with close-set, almost crossed, eyes behind the fogged glasses, and a little Hitler moustache, a crowning gesture of irony and self-hate, growing on his lip. I had met him before and had listened to his voice, a dry sparrow chirping about literature and ideas, in the previous year's Mezzanine where very few people were truly interested in either. But Icarus was not for this world, and the world was right not to be interested in him, right to turn its back on him. Anyone with a hope of joining the grand procession or dancing at the wedding feast had already been forced to let his own Icarus drop into the sea within himself and bend his back to his own plough, sail his own ship toward a port less important than the sun. I watched him vanish; I saw the white legs slip into the water. He must have gone home.

As I moved through the corridors I came on other kinds of paintings; the whole Mezzanine for a while seemed to be a gallery where the truths of life as known to the old masters were on display. A kind old man who had been my most beloved professor stood in a deserted section of corridor, his back to a bulletin board crowded with notices of meetings and advertisements of publishers. It was the reverse of a Rembrandt portrait; his face was in shadow while the whole background glowed wtih artificial light. The inner light is difficult to see in the Mezzanine; even under the best conditions it is concealed behind saturnine countenances, and the eyes through which it gazes on the world are apt to be sunk in a network of wrinkles. Nor do such eyes glow as novelists and painters imagine; after a lifetime of reading they tend to

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lose color and to stare rather abstractly. Yet as I came closer to him I was aware of his humble vitality, and his radiance included me for a brief moment.

In another corner of the Mezzanine I found another old teacher of mine, now retired, holding court, surrounded by generations of his students. His fine, wan voice sang over them, holding sway as it once did in the classroom. He alone among them has not aged; he reached plenitude decades ago, and has lived on the accumulation of his wisdom ever since. The lesser lights in his orbit continue to suffer on their way to wisdom; vicissitude is still engaged in making men of them. He, on the other hand, has long since grown too old to be a man, and become a mandarin. There is indeed something Chinese about his smooth old face and the high cranium filled with the poetry and manners of the eighteenth century. He has lived all his life in an eighteenth-century drawing room of the mind, enjoying Pope, Mozart, and the letters of Lady Montagu. An expression of quick wit is permanently stamped on his face and the eyes behind rimless glasses gaze with a certain patrician benevolence on the world. He is more erect, and in many ways more worldly, than any of his students. He could attend a king. They often have the wrong shapes or the wrong names; they lack wit and do not dress well enough. The world winds through the spectacles on their noses and is considerably diminished before it reaches them; they stand around him like drab owls. One feels that he alone among them enjoys the world; they have not even found pleasure in reading, and they are so blinded by sentimentality that they do not even make love properly to their wives—at least, that is the old scholar's gleeful opinion. At the end of his life he mainly enjoys making malicious jokes.

Outside the groups there was always a fringe of isolated young people, cast adrift and looking for a place to anchor. One could never forget for a minute that the Modern Language Association convention is commonly known to graduate students as "the slave market." These were the slaves, looking for a job, trying to find heads of departments in the confusion, rehearsing their qualifications in their minds as they walked about with angry looks on their faces, unable to reconcile themselves to the sense of conviviality which possessed the rest.

I was not one of these, nor yet a member of one of the grand processions. I had come eagerly looking for the self-portrait which I usually found in the faces of old friends. The difficulty was that my friends were not a unified group; they stemmed from many periods in my life, and each of them knew me to be something different, a summation of what I was at a certain time and place. The first few times I attended

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MLA conventions, I found a kind of reckless delight in being confronted by opposing conceptions of myself. Faced with irreconcilable periods of my past (the reckless undergraduate, the cynical graduate student, the starving doctoral candidate, the morose instructor, etc.) I would transcend them, as brandy transcends wine, by distilling my own essence and holding these friends of two vanished ages together by sheer exultation. But others have selves too, and they drift just as I drift from the moment of the past when we meant something in common. Some of us drift in the same direction, but most of us have to come leaping across the ages toward what we were; for a moment we bask in the warm fragrance of old sentiment, but there is a wind blowing through our bones, and we stare at each other furtively, unable to imagine who this being is who now stands before us, older than we would have believed possible.

These things are increasingly difficult to face. At my last convention I was still young when I went up that flight of stairs; I am older now, and I do not think I will go to any more MLA conventions, but I only feel that way now. The time will come when I will again have to explore the nature of my own life, and then I will seek the Mezzanine, though each time the burden of knowledge which it carries, the sense of being in a dark wood in the middle of a journey, becomes heavier and more intolerable. How long can a person stand entirely outside the frame of the painting, pointing out the ploughman, the ox, the shepherd, the ship, and the dim legs of Icarus. One cannot live in a shifting kaleidoscope of identities; one must at last be willing to *be*. If I am to let Icarus die, then let him drown, let him not be washed in sea-weed on my beaches, let him not reproach me with the flight which I did not take, let him not tell me how delicate were the wax wings he wore or how the sun ennobled his flight, however brief, into more beautiful regions than that protective curve of shoreline where everything looks down into the grave. Can I love him while I deny him?

Such questions do not occur in the turmoil of the corridor; they come in reflection afterward, when the convention begins to fragment and you begin to wonder with which of your earlier selves you will have dinner and pass the evening. The halls are growing empty when you make last-minute hurried appointments with people who aren't quite the ones you wanted to see that evening, but by then it is too late, and anything is better than to be alone.

You descend into the Lobby with its tan rugs and its tan Christmas tree that does not shed its needles. You feel some relief, because you have a place here, a reserved room. You leave the mythology of the

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personal world, the sense of yourself which has grown out of a childhood of Christmas trees that would not stand up straight, and enter the higher self of the Hotel. You flow through its arteries with the assurance of a red corpuscle that knows its own plasma, and you are carried, with increasing sense of desolation, to the utmost limbs of the organism, feeling lonelier and lonelier as you move down the capillary that leads you to yourself (W-1101), where, after you have ransomed yourself from the bellboy, you find it impossible to reconcile the personal myth with the general, to fit your shabby and discolored psyche into a light brown room with tan curtains. It is impossible to sit alone in that room, for the room is a contradiction: it is designed on principles of togetherness and other-directedness; it takes its inspiration from the Lobby, where your suit and necktie are important, because others are looking at you. But it is impossible to be other-directed where there are no others; therefore there is a moment of real fear when you think, "I should function here. I should use that telephone, make notes on that desk-pad, turn that light-switch, hang *something* on each of those hangers, dampen all the towels and unroll all the toilet-paper. I must be one of the appropriate people, one of those who fits easily into a rectangle, one of those with no burned-out bulbs or cracked ornaments, one of those who does not shed his needles." After straightening your tie in the mirror where the Hotel watches you because it is in your very lenses, you run a comb through your hair, concealing the places where the needles have been falling, then reach for the door-knob with sweating palms and walk out into the corridor, shutting the door on the problem of your conflicting selves, and you will not return until you are drunk enough for both of you to sleep together.

Walter Stone

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Hans Meyerhoff

AN AMERICAN ODYSSEY*

I have been browsing, of late, through a number of critical studies in American literature, and I have been thinking about the image of America they convey. Instead of reviewing Mr. Chase's book, which was the editorial assignment, I have indulged myself by pursuing some general reflections suggested by these books. The views expressed are not those of a professional in American literature, but of a layman who came to this country at the threshold of his adult life.

To begin with, the literary critic seems to be looking for something that isn't there. He is always trying to discover what is "essentially" or "characteristically" American in the literature of the United States. He is constantly reaching for something, say, a sense of cultural identity or a grand synthesis of the cultural life, which was beyond the grasp of the imaginative minds who created American literature. He acts, in Mr. Kazin's words, as the great lay philosopher in America. Like Mencken, the early Van Wyck Brooks or Edmund Wilson, he may try to reshape the cultural ideal by a radical critique of society; like T. S. Eliot or some of the New Critics, he may cultivate a cultural heritage which does not correspond to social reality. In either case, the critic is engaged in an enterprise which vies with the making of literature itself. His work is part of the making of an American culture. His aim is to validate the myth of a national consciousness, which the great

* Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition,* Doubleday Anchor Original, 1957, $.95; Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness,* Knopf, 1958, $4.00; and *Literature in America,* an anthology selected and introduced by Philip Rahv, Meridian Books, 1957, $1.95. My comments are based primarily on material in these three books, with an occasional assist from D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature,* Doubleday Anchor (reprint), 1951, $.75.

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writers in American literature never achieved.[1]

For, as everybody knows, American literature is regional, not national; its characteristics and consciousness are regional—New England, Southern, Mississippi river—not national or American. The same is true for European literature as well. Europe does not represent a unified culture, at least not until our own times. It has been as loose and federated an assembly of cultural units as America. The literature and culture of Europe is regional: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Irish, not European— the crucial difference being that these regional units developed a cultural homogeneity and established a national identity which served as common background for a national literature. Thus national identity in the different "regions" of Europe coincided, roughly, with cultural identity. This did not happen in the United States.

"The United States," as James Fenimore Cooper wrote in 1828—Toqueville made the same observation—"is the first nation that possessed institutions and, of course, distinct opinions of its own, that was ever dependent on a foreign people for its literature." The Declaration of Independence was a political, not a cultural, document. The Liberty Bell is a political, not a cultural, symbol. National identity in the United States rests upon a political structure, an economic system, a popular ideology and a common history; it does not include a distinct literary tradition. The culture of New England and the South, the most significant centers of regional literature in America, was European. The dominant strains of guilt and sin running through this literature are a European heritage: the Puritans brought their Manichean conscience with them across the sea; the exploitative, feudal society of the South was a replica of Europe's. Moreover, neither Massachusetts nor Mississippi—as radically different in their cultural background and in their "American" way of life as Dublin and Budapest—became cen-

1 The special function of the critic in American life puts a great burden upon his work and perhaps helps to explain (i) why he commands a special prestige, (ii) why the voices of criticism often threaten to drown out the voices of creative imagination, and (iii) why the critic so often employs a magic vocabulary. At the moment, the magic words are "myth" and "archetype." I share Mr. Arvin's sentiments that "few words have been used more glibly," and there is a good discussion on the excess of myth criticism in Mr. Chase's book. It would make an interesting study, I think, to compare the role of the critic and the historian. The function of the latter, similar to the critic's, seems to be not only to write *about* the history of the United States, but at the same time to create a sense of history and national consciousness. This would explain what I have always found most puzzling: the enormous output of historical works in a nation not yet two hundred years old and the ceaseless combing and rewriting of the same material, especially the lives of the great national heroes and the great national sagas like the Civil War.

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ters of a *national* culture as did, say, Athens or Rome, Paris or London, Weimar or Vienna. Nor did they, or any other region, produce a dominant figure like Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Racine, Goethe, Pushkin, or Tolstoy who became a *personal* symbol for a national literature. "So long as Shakespeare is performed and read in England," writes an English critic and novelist, "his influence on the novel will continue, simply because for us his work is the final standard of imaginative writing." It is altogether fitting that there be Stratford festivals in Canada and Connecticut, because Shakespeare remains the ultimate standard for the American imagination as well. Cooper was right: "It is quite idle to say that the American has not just as good a right to claim Milton, and Shakespeare, and all the old masters of the language, for his countrymen, as an Englishman." Nor has there been any change in the case of the "new" masters during the last hundred years. The textbook division of literature into "American" and "English" is completely arbitrary and meaningless. Where do we put Dickens or Henry James, T. S. Eliot or W. H. Auden, and why?

The fusion of a national and cultural consciousness in the regions of Europe was well under way and, for the most part, completed by the time the United States declared their political independence.[2] In every case, the European experience antedates the most important phase of the American experience, the westward movement and the coming of the industrial age—historically symbolized in the victory of Northern industry over Southern chivalry. Both developments defeated the old regional centers of culture. In our times, New England and the South are "backward" areas; New Bedford and New Orleans are quaint relics, of interest to tourists only, or historians, as charming and dead as Bruges or Avignon. Nor did the wave of the future, in the name of which the opening of the West and the industrial conquest were waged, fulfill the American dream, secretly shared and nourished by all the worn and weary masses cast upon these shores—the dream of a new life and a new world, "the dream of a new human relationship," as D. H. Lawrence called it.

The journey into this distant, unknown future never reached home. The birth of a nation did not give birth to a "new human relationship." The New World did not redeem the failure of the Old; it did not sustain the hope for a new life on earth. The American Odyssey has been a long day's journey into the night—from Captain Ahab to Jay Gatsby. "We are the pioneers of the world," Melville exclaimed, "the advance-

2 Cf. the great age of English literature at the time of the first Elizabeth or the classical age of French culture at the time of the Sun King.

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guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a path in the new world that is ours." But Melville also lived to write the crushing epitaph to this dream: Ishmael surviving the wreckage of the *Pequod* by clinging to his own coffin. Later, it is Gatsby floating dead in the swimming pool. He, too, believed "in the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us." He, too, believed in the Platonic conception of America which "eluded us then" as Gatsby's "Platonic conception of himself" suffered shipwreck on the shores of reality. "Tomorrow we will run faster," it is true; but what makes Sammy run?

What's he running away from? From Jacob Gatz, of course, i.e., from the image of his European, Jewish origin. It is a familiar theme of criticism that the American mind suffers from a divided, unhappy consciousness, torn between high ideals and catchpenny realities and split in its allegiance to the past and to the future, to the Old World and to the New. From Goethe and Chateaubriand to Kafka and Auden, "the European imagination," as Mr. Levin says, "has looked toward the western horizon whenever it turned from the citadels of constraint and artifice back to nature or forward to Utopia"; and the American imagination, in turn, has looked back to the old continent as a symbol of poverty and tyranny, privilege and exploitation, military entanglements and deceit. But there is another image as well, a nostalgic memory that has haunted the American Odyssey, an image of Europe as home, roots, and a sense of belongingness and identity which were lost in the restless pursuit of an unknown future. Europe was also a symbol of cultural pastures which were never cultivated in the new Jerusalem. It was Cooper who first drew up a list of magic symbols of the past which he missed in America: "No costume for the peasant, no wig for the judge, no baton for the general, no diadem for the chief magistrate." And no native European could have been more nostalgic and more snobbish than Henry James in his famous sequel to Cooper's complaints: "No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church . . . no country gentlemen, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches . . ."; and so it goes until we get, via Oxford and Eton, to the bottom of the list, "no Epsom nor Ascot." James rightly asked himself "what was left" after enumerating these "items of high civilization . . . which are absent from the texture of American life."

Thus the American Odyssey is Janus-faced and frustrating from the start. It is a movement away from and back to civilization, away from and back to Europe, away from and back to the past. Again, it was Fenimore Cooper who first created the pastoral myth in American

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literature, Leatherstocking as the silent, solitary sentinel at the edge of the primeval forest; but this early vision of Gary Cooper in *High Noon* was dreamt in the midst of high society in Paris. Leatherstocking is a romantic figure, all right, and an enduring literary symbol, as Mr. Parkes has shown, but he is not only a fugitive from the civilization of Europe; he is also the first exile in America. American literature is full of images of moving and running; but this theme of mobility is not only a running away from the old life, not only a westward movement or a northwest passage, nor only a creative response to the opportunities and the freedom of America; it also signifies a sense of *déracinement* in the New World, a running away and a withdrawal from the American scene itself. Classic American literature is a salutary reminder of the fact that this movement of withdrawal, this inner displacement of its creative minds, this romantic rejection of reality reaches back deep into the last century. Hawthorne and Emily Dickinson shut themselves off, for years, from the outside world in their rooms in Salem and Amherst. Together with Poe, Thoreau, Melville or Henry Adams, they form the first wave of an inner emigration in the modern world. Henry James, Pound, Eliot, Hemingway, and Henry Miller constitute the second wave of outright escape and expatriation from America.

Displacement, dissociation, and disillusionment are, again, familiar themes in criticism. Says Mr. Rahv: "To my mind, the principal theme of this (i.e., the modern American) novel, from Dreiser and Anderson to Fitzgerald and Faulkner, has been the discrepancy between the high promise of the American dream and what history has made of it." If Dreiser, according to Mr. Kazin, "committed the one sin that a writer can commit in our country: he would not accept this society itself as wholly real," this is the original sin of every authentic voice in America. It has always said *no*; "for all men who say *yes* lie," as Melville wrote. The American novel, as Mr. Chase shows, has always explored the "aesthetic possibilities of alienation, contradiction, and disorder." It has always succumbed to "the power of blackness," which Mr. Levin has chosen as the unifying theme for his study of Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville. It has never subscribed to a liberal imagination, not even in the case of Whitman who was a great yea-sayer: "the United States are essentially the greatest poem"; but who also felt the power of doubt and disillusion in *Democratic Vistas*. So did Thomas Wolfe, another partial yea-sayer, who confessed "that we are all lost in America, but I believe we shall be found" and who clung to this hope as "America's everlasting, living dream." For this hope was again the dream of an orgastic future. "I think the life which we have fashioned in America,

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and which has fashioned us . . . was self-destructive . . . and must be destroyed."

No responsible critic can dispel the curse which has isolated and alienated the creative imagination in America from the social reality. If he points out, as Cooper and Hawthorne did a long time ago, that the characteristic form of the novel in America has been the "romance," this is only another way of saying that the writer found reality self-destructive and unbearable. Thus Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and even Washington Irving, sought both refuge and relief in a ghostly, spectral world of fantasy, horror, and mystery. Romance, as a literary genre, is a child of romanticism. Thus another way of characterizing the classic American novel of the nineteenth century is to say that it explored the aesthetic possibilities of romanticism to its limits; conversely, it did not work its passage home, as did Stendhal, Balzac, Tolstoy, Dickens, or Flaubert, from romanticism to some kind of social realism. The creative imagination did not find a "home" in America.[3]

The grandeur and pathos of classic American literature lies in this sense of homelessness, in the spirit of refusal to come to terms with reality, at the price of isolation and alienation. For the romantic rejection of reality was an implicit affirmation of human hopes and aspirations at a time when the social and historical conditions in the United States not only were incompatible with, but actually ran counter to, the attainment of these ideals. What did the aesthetic sensibilities of American writers suffer from in anger, horror, and revulsion? Not only from the sins of their Puritan ancestors, or the guilt of a feudal caste; they also suffered from a sense of failure in America. More concretely, they also suffered from the success of the economic, industrial, and technological transformation by which the United States consolidated their national identity and achieved their international power. This was the rock on which the American ideal foundered, the dream of pursuing life, liberty, and happiness toward a "new human relationship," beyond the blessings of the ballot box and the comforts of a prosperous, affluent, and expanding economy.

The industrial age is often cited—by Americans themselves—as their greatest achievement; it is just as often attacked by critics of the American way of life, not only in Henry Adams's vision of "The Virgin

3 Only Henry James joined the company of the great masters of the novel in England, France and Russia; and he left the United States. Realism, or naturalism, at the beginning of this century is a kind of postcript to the classic, romantic tradition in American literature, and a relatively brief interlude. With O'Neill, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, Faulkner, Ellen Glasgow, and Tennessee Williams we are back in the "romantic" tradition.

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and the Dynamo," or in Henry James's indictment, but also by critical voices in Europe. Thus it is only fitting to record, first, that the classic writers of the nineteenth century were the "advance-guard" in responding to this radical transformation of Western culture and, second, that the triumph of the technological apparatus is not a "characteristically" American phenomenon either. What was new in the American experience was not the development of an industrial technology as such, but its speed, scale, finesse, and perfection. The moving spirit behind it was European. The captains of American industry inherited the entrepreneurial spirit of Columbus, Cortez, and Pizarro; the technical know-how of Franklin and Edison derives from the scientific foundations of Galileo and Newton. The atom was not split in America but in Germany. Both Europe and America have drawn upon the same scientific resources and worshipped the same Faustian spirit; but the United States developed the potentialities of science and technology with a speed and on a scale which carried the industrial age far beyond the European experience. It is only in our own time that Europe has caught up with these tendencies inherent in its own scientific and technical tradition.

It has become a cliché to say that America is too young to produce a national literature and culture. This is true in the sense that the United States lack "the tone of time" which Henry James missed most as a stimulus to his own imagination. But it is also true, as Mr. Levin observes perceptively, that this is "the oldest country in the world today if we date its coming-of-age by the after-effects of technological development." Now, as the technical apparatus has taken over, the arts, and not only literature, have withdrawn from the public domain, and not only in the United States. Where industry has moved in, beauty has moved out, everywhere.

This perspective throws a different light upon the interminable debate between Europe and America; it may also help us see certain dominant themes in American literature, *e.g.*, guilt, or the rites of initiation and exorcism, from a different angle. It is true that Huck Finn, Isabel Archer, or Frederic Henry were innocents abroad; but it does not follow that they were innocent at home. On the contrary, vis-a-vis the red man and the black man, vis-a-vis the forests, rivers, and mountains, they were anything but innocent. They came loaded with a sense of guilt; and they compounded it in the conquest of America. Of course, they were pathfinders and pioneers, pilgrims of plenty and progress; but they were also industrial bosses, oil magnates, financial titans, swollen with hybris and reaping the grapes of wrath. There is nothing innocent about the defloration of America; but the guilt is again an

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ancient curse, for whence did the pioneers bring the image of conquest, exploitation, power, and millionaire mansions but from the rape of Europa.

All the books I have read cite the closing paragraphs from *The Great Gatsby* as a particularly moving testimony to the American dream: "As the moon rose higher, I became aware of the old island that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in hisory with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." Compelled into an *aesthetic contemplation* he neither understood nor desired—how could he, for he was a Dutch sailor, an English divine, a German soldier, an Irish peasant, a Jewish tailor, a Mexican grape-picker, or an African slave. He did not come here to contemplate; he came to conquer, to work, and to serve, to take possession of, and despoil, "the fresh, green breast of the new world." Like Gatsby, "he didn't know that it (i.e., the dream) was already behind him," that he could develop in America, on a larger and more ambitious scale, only what would have happened—and what *has* happened—in Europe.

If one were to play the game of mythic images, one might speculate (as none of the critics do, surprisingly), that Moby Dick, the white whale, the great animal-God representing the unconquerable forces of nature, the mammalian sea monster as a substitute for the great earth-mother—that Moby Dick is a symbol of America and that the evil King Ahab, and his self-destructive assault upon the white whale with the obviously phallic symbols of barbed harpoons, is a noble nineteenth-century predecessor of the ignoble and impotent Popeye in our times. The whole idea of kingship in America, from George III to the captains of industry and the kingfishes of politics, is infected by original sin. Fatherhood is not an apostolic succession, but a fatal flaw, a source of overweening pride, excessive guilt, and hidden defeat. The myth critics can take it from here; but it isn't far to another prominant theme in the American Odyssey, Telemachus in search of a father.

Initiation and exorcism, too, are ambivalent symbols. They are funeral rites of the past in a twofold sense: to banish the ghosts of the Old World and to bury the burden of guilt acquired in building a new home. They are also rites of propitiation, of purging the powers of blackness, of making peace with ancestral voices in the new world. Few

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documents in American literature are more poignant than those celebrating this act of propitiation, *e.g.,* the friendship of Huck and Jim, the marriage of Ishmael and Queequeg, the initiation of the young boy in *The Bear,* by Sam Fathers.[4] In works such as these, there is a brief moment of *satori,* of insight and purgation, of reconciliation and peace. There is a momentary fulfillment of the "dream of a new human relationship" on the banks of the Mississippi. But this moment of fulfillment is as "romantic"—what is it but another version of the pastoral myth?—as Poe's tales of blackness, despair, and terror. For Huck's successors soon beat it to the banks of the Seine, Thames, and Tiber.

Fitzgerald was right: the past prevailed over the future. "So we beat on," he concludes, "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past"—to wit, Chartres and St. Mont-Michel, the Salzburg seminar and the festival of "two worlds" in Spoleto, whose mayor, fittingly, is a Communist, borne back into ancient myths and archetypes, the art treasures of the Old World, the "cultural heritage" of the great books, the Greek drama, and the wisdom of Zen. The exodus did not discover the promised land. The American Odyssey ends where it began—in Europe.

The Prodigal Son has come home; and he has been welcomed back, with mixed feelings, to be sure, but, ultimately, with a Stoic acceptance that it could not be otherwise, not only because Europe has ceased to function as an independent political entity, not only because it has caught up with the American *Wirtschaftswunder,* not only because America has picked up the check, but also because, like Eliot's Tiresias, it has foreseen and fore-suffered it all. In this sense, the American imagination was in advance of Europe: it reacted, with romantic despair, against the coming of a "new world" in which private dreams would turn into public nightmares. In this sense, the classic American writers were wiser, older, and more "modern": they didn't find anything worth identifying with in this new world which was the core of shared experience in the United States and which anticipated the fate of Europe.[5] It was Baudelaire who discovered the universal vision of Poe long before contemporary American writers gained fame and fortune in France.

4 The name Faulkner chose is, of course, a literal symbol, substituting the idea of a great "black" father for the discredited, guilt-ridden tradition of the great white father.

5 The American experience, being post-industrial, was ahead of Europe's. The Russian experience, being pre-industrial, was behind Europe's. This seems to have been a particularly advantageous position for both American and Russian writers to anticipate, and diagnose, the impending crisis of Western culture.

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They have returned where they belong; for after a temporary disruption of two hundred years, America and Europe again live in the same cultural ambience. America's past is Europe's present; and both are joined to the same future of a universal culture.

A society whose fathers are refugees from all corners of the world and whose sons are now stationed, as soldiers, in all corners of the world, a society whose technological apparatus has transformed the face of the earth in the same image, so that even its avowed enemy can appeal to no other standard of excellence than that of equalling or exceeding the technical triumph of America, a nation which is a kingpin in international politics, the center of international finance, the master of international media of communication and entertainment, a people united with at least half of the world by a network of treatises and alliances, political, economic, and military, and "borne back ceaselessly into the past" to attend coronations and ceremonies of the Holy Year, two-world festivals, seminars, conferences, committees, and research projects—such a society is universal and international. The American melting pot has become the cultural melting pot of the Western world. The American way of life has become a universal way of life or, as Mr. Levin puts it, "the human condition accelerated, amplified, and projected on a wide screen." It is the same human situation everywhere, the ideal case for an existential analysis.

Who is "more intransigently American" than Hemingway? Mr. Levin asks. Yet most of Hemingway's fiction takes place abroad—in Europe, Africa, or the West Indies. Who, one might ask, was more intransigently Welsh than Dylan Thomas? Yet he fulfilled his destiny in the bars on Third Avenue, and he has become an American legend. Why? Because the fate of man, or the fate of literature, is universal in a world in which the technical apparatus reigns supreme. The national state and cultural autonomy are anachronisms. Europe's "culture" is also a thing of the past. Its "identity," like Gatsby's, lies "somewhere back in that vast obscurity" into which the cultural symbols and the "aesthetic contemplation" of nature have receded before the coming of a new world. Just as America lived through this historical phase as a part of Europe, so Europe is now reliving the historical experience of America as part of the Atlantic Community.

The result is an international culture, perhaps not unlike the international community established by the Roman Empire along the shores of the Mediterranean. T. S. Eliot is by no means the only "international culture-hero," as Delmore Schwartz aptly dubbed him some time ego; so were Henry James, and Thomas Mann; and so are Ezra

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Pound, Thornton Wilder, W. H. Auden, Aldous Huxley, Sartre, Maritain, or Sir Herbert Read. In fact, the division of modern literature (or thought) into "American" and "European" is now as arbitrary and meaningless as the distinction between American and English literature has always been. Dostoevsky and Gide, Proust and Joyce, Kafka and Camus, the angry young men or the beat generation are all symbols of a universal literature in the Western world. The novel being a universal commodity, the critic himself becomes the most internationally-minded figure, a cultural bridge, as we say, a busy go-between in the exchange and fusion of two worlds. Try as he may to discover what is "essentially" or "characteristically" American, he always ends up, sooner or later, by rediscovering "the great tradition," which is not American.

Thus Ulysses has come home to preside over the Atlantic Community, an international culture in which the images of Europe and America blend and blur. And the writer faces the same old task whether he lives on this side of the Atlantic or on the other. He must begin all over again—to find, identify, and preserve himself as an authentic voice in the wilderness. Nothing has changed, after all, as if Columbus had never sailed the ocean blue.

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BOOKS

THE MUSE AS HOUSE GUEST

NEW POEMS BY AMERICAN POETS 2. Edited by Rolfe Humphries, Ballantine Books. 35c.
THE NEW POETS OF ENGLAND AND AMERICA. An Anthology edited and selected by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, Louis Simpson. Meridian Books. $1.45.
POEMS 1947-1957, by William Jay Smith. Atlantic-Little Brown. $3.50.
AN APOLOGY BOTH WAYS. By Richard Aldridge. Indiana University Press. $2.75.
POETS OF TODAY IV. Scribner's. $3.95.
NO LIGHT EVADED. By Lisa Grenelle. The Golden Quill Press. $2.50.
BERG, GOODMAN, MEZEY. New Ventures Press. 75c.
THE FALSE & TRUE UNICORN. By James Broughton. Evergreen Books. $1.

Young America can still be heard singing, by anyone with very sensitive auditory equipment. Writing verse, publishing volumes, giving public readings from their work, winning prizes and fellowships, a lot of young men and women continue to go about the business of being poets. If this is news to most readers, lost as I imagine most readers are in contemplation of "the novel," it is partly because the poems of the young make little clamor. Resourceful leaders are also lacking to them, and self-advocacy in the form of critical pronouncements is generally not a part of their business.

Yet the younger poets are not without ample public support, as I gather from the biographical data included in the several volumes I have at hand. Honors, for example, abound: if a poet is unlucky enough to miss out on one of the Borestone Mountain Awards he may still capture the Glascock Memorial Prize or the less lugubrious-sounding Lamont Poetry Selection, bestowed annually by the Academy of American Poets. Besides this group, a multitude of lesser societies for the encouragement of verse writing flourish, whether in Atlanta, Worcester, Denver, or New York City. Even the Government has one, named The Federal Poets. In some respects, moreover, conditions of publication seem to have become increasingly favorable to the little known poet. It is true that the more prominent publishers continue to list just about

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the same judiciously small number of poetry "titles" that they have always listed. But some of the university presses (Michigan, Indiana) now include volumes of verse among their scholarly items. Then the flourishing paperback gets many poets into public circulation, often in an attractive as well as inexpensive format (e.g. the delightful volume Evergreen Books has made out of James Broughton's *True & False Unicorn.*)

As for magazines that print respectable poetry, there is always, for the *poème bien fait*—and not too radically original—pre-eminently *The New Yorker.* The small audience magazines that give much space to verse are now more numerous than anyone except the harassed librarian in the periodical room could imagine. *Broom, Blast, Blues* and the other ancestral little magazines seem to have multiplied like minks through the subsequent decades. Unfamiliar names crowd the acknowledgment pages of many volumes. For the right to reprint her work, one poet renders thanks to *Spirit, Voices, Quicksilver, The Step Ladder, Kaleidograph, Poetry Digest, The Lyric, Variegation, American Weave, University of Kansas Review, Prairie Schooner, Yankee, The Bronxville Villager, Educational Forum, American Bard,* and *The Fawnlight.*

The younger poets are not only richly honored and thoroughly published, they are distinctly a job-holding generation. A census-taker would have no trouble with them when it came to specifying their occupations. Among the contributors to *New Poems By American Poets #2,* a representative paperback anthology edited by Rolfe Humphries, only old timers like E. E. Cummings and Vincent McHugh seem to be listed as unemployed. Nor are the remainder of Humphries's contributors to be found exclusively where one might expect to find them: in university posts. A young poet today may be in anything from occupational therapy to the Catholic priesthood to the U. S. Forest Service. But the classroom certainly claims the majority of them—so many that Robert Frost is at pains to defend them in a foreword to *New Poets of England and America,* declaring that "poetry has been a great concern of schools all down the ages." Such, however, is the eagerness of editors for fresh material that they seek it from poets who are still in the undergraduate stage. One young man whose work occupies a third of a volume with two co-versifiers is advertised as "studying with Robert Lowell at Boston University" while a second is "studying Classics with Dr. Roger Hornsby" (University unnamed).

So far as my data goes, the record for continuous recognition and uninterrupted occupation is held by a twenty-seven year old poet whose first volume has recently been given to the world by a university press.

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The jacket reads in part: "After graduating in 1952 from Amherst College, where he won the Colin Armstrong Poetry Prize, he was employed as a research analyst with the National Security Agency in Washington, D. C. In 1953 he was drafted into the army and served in the Counter Intelligence Corps until his discharge in May, 1955. While in the army, he applied for a Fulbright scholarship to study in England and was awarded one to Worcester College, Oxford." No grass grew under these winged feet, even "while in the army."

No doubt the favorable—if that is the word for it—economic situation of recent years has affected the tone and substance of the poetry written by the young generation. So has the domesticity which is now made easily possible, if it is not actually encouraged, by their job holding status. A verse writing father and husband is less likely than a muse ridden bachelor to arrive in the classroom with a hangover and his papers uncorrected. But marriage is obviously an attractive as well as advisable state for the young poets, and it provides them with a stock of poetic subjects. Home, wife, children, parents, pets, gardens, summer resorts, travel *en famille* make up the unromantic romance of this poetry and equip the poet with a special kind of consciousness—what it is I shall try to make clear later on. For this observation there is not only the internal evidence of the poems but—again—the evidence supplied by writers of biographical notes. Such writers seem to be in love with family happiness these days and like to name the poet's wife, enumerate his children, and offer other homely details. We learn of one poet that "while there (in Cambridge, England), he was married, in 1954, to — —, who travelled all the way from Missouri for the purpose." Missouri *is* a far piece to travel from, for any purpose; and it is interesting to discover that another poet bears a different name "in private life" and that "three children and many more dogs share her interest, but she admits she 'can't communicate with cats'."

New Poets of England and America assists us in penetrating the apparent anonymity, not to say nonentity, of the youthful band of men and women who make verse under these circumstances. The volume has been carefully edited, probably with some such purpose as this in mind, by three of the young poets themselves: Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson. The editors include work by poets ranging in age from about twenty-two to about forty. The presence of some of Robert Lowell's impassioned poetry allows us to see how little impassioned—in any usual sense—the work of the younger writers is, and so encourages us to look in it for other qualities. Representatives of the West Coast School are not, so far as I can make out, included; and

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while this omission makes for unity in the volume, it also makes for a certain monotony as well as an incomplete view of "the new poets." Nor is Frost's foreword, good as it is in itself, a substitute for the introduction which the editors might better have written for themselves, thereby setting forth, as Frost does not dream of doing, their intentions and claims. Does an anthology of verse have to be "sponsored" like a television program? If so, Frost's is of course the best of brand names; and it is noteworthy that the young now acknowledge, as the young did not always do, his mastery. But the relation in this case, as in that of the young generation with other established poets and artists, does not seem to me to be a very active or helpful relation. It is the soothing one of homage eagerly given and complacently received; the atmosphere is that of a congenial party rather than of a working studio. (Indeed, the poem of homage to this or that authority is among the stock subjects.) And for all Frost says of "schools," it was not as a poet in residence or a Brooks and Warren instructor that he learned to write "An Old Man's Winter Night" or "A Servant to Servants."

A bursting rocket photographed against a black sky is on the cover of *New Poets*. Shall we say that the fireworks are all on the cover? It depends on what is meant by fireworks. In the contents of the volume there is little pyrotechnic display in the form of verbal or typographic experiments. The presiding muse here is unassertive, intelligent, charming, voluble, company-conscious—the perfect guest. The scene tends to be indoors, the mode of communication is conversation, the talk is generally good. If this state of poetic manners excludes shows of unique energy and vision, it at least does so deliberately rather than furtively. And one of the contributors, Adrienne Rich, seems to allude to the whole situation when she ends "The Celebration in the Plaza" with

> *The viceroy of fireworks goes his way,*
> *Leaving us with a sky so dull and bare*
> *The crowd thins out: what conjures them to stay?*
>
> *The road is cold with dew, and by and by*
> *We see the constellations overhead.*
> *But is that all? some little children cry.*
>
> *All we have left, their pedagogues reply.*

The viceroy of fireworks goes his way; the emperor of ice cream is dead. All we have left is a rueful recollection of their exploits. So say the pedagogues. But their dogmatic gloom is belied by the charm of the poem itself, which says more than it asserts.

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The virtues of this poem are, generally speaking, the virtues of all Miss Rich's work and of the best work of her generation. The language is neither systematically colloquial, as Frost's language tends to be, nor alternately colloquial and conceptual, as Eliot's was in his early poems; nor does it burst into a fine spray of fantastication as Stevens's was apt to do. Miss Rich seems to have access to some common style, a language which she and her contemporaries all tend to speak easily, with a minimum of individual inflection. It permits them to retain the "conversational tone," that all but universal idiom of modernist poetry, and yet to sound it without the apparent exercise of any strict selective principle. So too with the structure of the verse, which distinctly scans but is free enough to allow the musical phrase, as distinguished from the metrical foot, a good deal of autonomy. But the way of this common style with metaphor is probably its most definitive trait. The proud, self-sufficient "image" of modernist poetry, subduing all local or random figuration to its central purpose, and offering to the reader the allurement of a dark glass turned on an enigmatic universe, is largely gone from this poetry. With it is gone the modernist assertion of the supremacy of imagination and the artist. To claim access to an *anima mundi* or to the omniscience of a Tiresias, in the manner of a Yeats or an Eliot, would occur to none of these poets, if I know them; there is not even anything resembling Wallace Stevens's businesslike evaluation of imaginative experience, his sense of it as a good investment or a proper form of insurance. Figures of speech are now apt to be announced by a candid "like" or "as;" the homely simile is back; experience is fancified rather than transformed; readers are cordially invited to share in the processes.

The muse as desirable guest is eminently and happily Miss Rich's muse. A woman in a non-feminist age, an artist in a time that is not conspicuously creative, she makes poetry out of a sense of limitations, is equable without the accusing calm of the self-accepting, wise without being a young owl. Her "Living In Sin" describes a studio love affair from the viewpoint of a mildly domestic minded girl. It is in twenty-seven lines of limpid unrhymed verse and is an admirable work of this poet and this time.

Some of the men poets are more ambitious than Miss Rich, but they are not often better. On many of them, too, acute feelings of limitation are patently at work; and the domestic status, in those who have it, is apt to induce the peculiar form of consciousness on which I remarked above. The poems that express it, in their several ways, are among the most original in the various volumes. This consciousness helps to do duty for the sense of rôle which good poets have and which

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does not seem to come easily to these younger poets. By sense of rôle I mean the kind of postures assumed by Whitman when he is being the cosmic reporter to whom all things are copy, or by Emily Dickinson when she queens it in her suffering universe, or by Ezra Pound when he is the Promethean exhorter, or by Frost and Stevens when they take up opposite but complementary positions toward the world's work, becoming respectively the visionary farmer and the Sunday poet with a Monday morning conscience. This dramatic conception of self vis-à-vis the reader and the world is, I suggest, largely alien to the younger poets, and the absence of it is probably more damaging to their work than the mere blackout of modernist fireworks. It is here, possibly, that the security provided by their common style and material well-being plays them false. They appear content to be just poets together, indifferent to the histrionic claims that poetry makes on a culture when poetry is a major art.

In that restrictive consciousness of theirs, however, there is something like an emergent sense of rôle. It is apt to express itself in a confessional form which has its antecedents in Eliot and Auden. But the confessor is now increasingly finite and personal. Saying I, he usually means his literal self in all its literal daily reality. " 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, Who is Donald Andrew Hall?" inquires Donald Hall; and in another poem (both of them in *New Poems*) he locates himself still more exactly: "I sit upon a changing porch and think / ideas about the insubstantial wood, that I may make real porches out of ink." Hall has other subjects and some expert verse, but a certain blunt assertion of self, as of a real poet in a real garden, place and hour and weather specified, state of mind clarified and moral drawn, does tend to characterize his performance. He has a more free spirited counterpart in W. D. Snodgrass who also makes poetry out of a very tangible personal relation to children, job, landscape and even to his surname ("Snodgrass is walking through the universe."). Pressure of circumstance makes this poet's consciousness half assertive and half uneasy. Out of the compound comes something freshly comic, for this American poet seems to have affinities with the comparable English school of Kingsley Amis, in his poems and novels, and Philip Larkin. In "Heart's Needle," a long poem about himself and a child of his, he has a clean graphic style; and in "April Inventory" his job is treated to a memorable burst of derision when he writes: "The sleek expensive girls I teach, Younger and pinker every year, Bloom gradually out of reach," and then goes on to sum up his recent successes and failures in love, friendship and scholarship. In one way or another, "my slovenly life, my dog-dead youth," as Howard Nemerov puts it in "The Va-

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cuum," gets a good deal of play among the younger poets; and Reed Whittemore, in one of his poems, declares the verse of it to be "Neither major nor minor but merely (an old kind) doodle," while "Doodle is waiting raised to a fine art."

The rôle is a slight one, and the present tyranny of "light verse" contributes to its attenuation. It has the painful effect of stifling any emotion beyond what can be experienced while one is being watched by a wife or a child or a class of students or—as it sometimes appears—by the poem one is writing. It produces an intensity of observation, a paucity of vision, and seems to render impossible any connection between poetry and the realm of general ideas.

An historical as opposed to a personal account of the rôle is given by Louis Simpson, a poet of greater scope than most and of formidable technical skill. I am quoting "The Silent Generation" in *New Poems*. It was his contemporaries, Simpson says, who "put the Devil down [meaning Hitler] with great enthusiasm—

But now our occupation
Is gone, our education
Is wasted on the town.

We lack enthusiasm.
Life seems a mystery;
It's like the play a lady
Told me about: "It's not . . .
It doesn't have a plot,"
She said, "It's history."

It probably is just history that has caused and is causing the impoverishment of the creative spirit, and not only in poetry and in Simpson's generation. Still, single poems may be superior to the general state of poetry, and individual talents may hold promise of development. In the volumes at hand there are superior poems by William Jay Smith, Richard Wilbur, William Meredith, Philip Booth, John Hollander, Anthony Hecht and others. In Hollander and Hecht, the pleasure in wit and musical structure seems to replace any acute preoccupation with self and history. And then there is W. S. Merwin, a poet who appears to have arrived on the contemporary scene out of another world. It is not yet a clearly defined location, and the atmosphere of it can be windy as well as airy. But Love is there a passion instead of a slogan, and verse shows a strange elemental confidence in itself, transcending jobs, awards, fellowships, history and the other conditions of its making.

F. W. Dupee

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BAD BY NORTH AND SOUTH

THE ANTIPHON. By Djuna Barnes. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $3.50.
J. B. By Archibald MacLeish. Houghton Mifflin. $3.50.

NORTH: I've been sent a verse play to review—O, I'll review it. But don't people know that I'm opposed to plays in verse? I've said it often enough. From Djuna Barnes's *The Antiphon* I've gotten further arguments to back up my prejudice. I'm more against the whole enterprise of so-called "poetic drama" than ever.

SOUTH: I have a bad verse play to review, too, Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.* But I'm not opposed to verse plays in general, as you are. After all, even if both of these works are as bad as we think, that doesn't mean the form as such is to be condemned. What if someone writes a good verse play?

NORTH: Most unlikely.

SOUTH: What about *Murder in the Cathedral?*

NORTH: That was not bad, to be sure. Very good, in fact. It's about the best thing we have in the genre. Nevertheless, I don't consider it an important play, and as Edmund Wilson noted, the one really good dramatic scene in it, is in prose. . . .

SOUTH: You told me you're against verse drama, but not why.

NORTH: *The Antiphon* is a perfect example of what is wrong with this kind of play. You get the impression that each character is trying to make a poem of his or her feelings; no one is swept into speech by action or emotion. Now who wants to go to the theater to watch people writing poetry? In this activity, there is indeed labor and pain, but not the kind of labor or pain we can enjoy—unless the result is a poem we ourselves produce.

SOUTH: But do not even Shakespeare's characters sometimes give the impression that they are writing poems?

NORTH: They do, at times, and at such times, the less Shakespearean they.

SOUTH: I was thinking of Othello's

> *It is the cause, It is the cause, my soul:*
> *Let me not name it to you, O chaste stars!*
> *It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood . . .*

NORTH: Let's take these lines. There is, of course, an element of "poetry writing" in them, at least in the first two lines, but in the third Othello quickly comes to the point when he says

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"Yet I'll not shed her blood . . ."

which directly relates him to the act before him. However, all references to the verse plays of the Elizabethans—and of Shakespeare in particular—when applied to the problem of the modern verse play, are very misleading. Poetical expression, I take it, was more spontaneous under the Elizabeth of those days, than of ours. It was, if you like, pre-reflective; nowadays, it is post-reflective. The last person you would expect to express himself—nowadays, that is—with poetic eloquence, would be a simple person involved in a serious action. The person most likely to express himself in life with poetic eloquence would be someone who had given thought to the problems of poetry. Nowadays, it takes *time* to write a poem, a lot of time to write a *modern* poem, and what we want on the stage, is the direct, immediate expression of feeling. You know something? I mean I want to tell you something you may not know: I would be interested in reading a verse play that was written overnight, as it is claimed that some of Lope de Vega's plays were. But I think the thing is impossible. I am sure the play I just read by Djuna Barnes must have taken years to compose. One result is that the characters scarcely talk to each other. Each one is intent on subtilizing and distilling his own thought and feeling into a verse expression adequate to the author's norms of rhetoric, and these are not at all dramatic norms. The result: there is no dialogue in any proper sense of the term, in this play, and the words spoken by any one character have scarcely any effect on the others. It is as if the real action lay in the production of words, poetic words, and as if each character was too exhausted by this effort to listen to what the others have to say.

SOUTH: Your judgment of Djuna Barnes's *The Antiphon* may be correct, but I think the play I have to review, MacLeish's *J. B.,* is worse, though in exactly the opposite way. Take the title, for instance. *J. B.* is, of course, short for Job. Now Job is short, and wonderfully so, as short as a cry, or a lifetime. Why abbreviate the name that sums up all abridgements and abbreviations? To bring Job up to date. But why bring Job up to date when there is nothing antiquated about him? Just as the name, which is so wonderful, is diminished poetically by the initials J. B., even so the story is banalized by being consciously placed in a modern setting. What makes MacLeish's play so objectionable is the author's effort to make it a real theatrical work with gags, punch lines, fast dialogue. We get all the dramaturgical tricks that are required by Broadway audiences; but every once in a while, the author sneaks in here and there a great line from the old book. Now I am not against Mr. MacLeish's trying to write a verse play, since

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no matter what you say, I remain unconvinced that the form, as such, is impossible. What I find obnoxious is MacLeish's utter lack of poetic inspiration, and his acceptance of cheap dramatic standards in retelling one of the greatest stories of our literature.

NORTH: I think I'm against cheap dramatic standards as much as you are.

SOUTH: What I am driving at is that the great affliction of drama is not, as you seem to think, that people are trying to write plays in verse. I'm inclined to think that type of effort a very commendable one, no matter how great the difficulty is. What I can't stand about MacLeish is his utter thoughtlessness. He has no point of view toward the story of Job that could justify his retelling it. Here is what I mean: a famous modern philosopher has said that the greatest tribute to being is for someone to desire not to be. The greatest tributes to being in literature, then, would be Job's curse of the day on which he was born, the choruses in Oedipus, and Hamlet's famous soliloquy. These would be the moments when being really *was;* they happen to be the greatest moments in our dramatic literature. Now from this point of view, we could understand why God preferred Job's curse of his own birth to the practical advice of Job's friends; also, why in response to Job's curse, God asserts the mere fact that He is. Now I'm not saying that a good drama about Job could be written from such a point of view, interesting though the view is. I'm trying to suggest something else; all the modern mind can add to the old story is reflection; now reflection is not the basis for a dramatic work. On the other hand, why take up a story of this kind if one has no significant thoughts about it? I do think drama is only possible where the dramatist's thought is involved, and where that thought is a direct, immediate, intuitively perceived sense of the meaning of some action.

NORTH: How you're coming around to my point of view, that poetry is impossible in drama when it is post-reflective. You're going even further, saying that the dramatist's thought should be pre-reflective; and I'm inclined to agree with you about that, too. But let me give you an example of the kind of speeches we get in Djuna Barnes's *The Antiphon:*

> *That was the day that story-book Augusta*
> *Feather-headed, fairy-tale Augusta*
> *In her mind's wild latitude laid out*
> *And armed such battlefield, tilt patch and list*
> *As out-geared Mars. My maximed mind*

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Out-maximed circus Maximus.
I hung the bright shields up, I spun the drill,
Clubbed the spears and standards, axe and mace.
I teased the olive, and all budding things
Into the loop that wheels a victor's head
And for his blood their own bright berries drop

Now I won't make the obvious point that no human being would ever talk like that. What I will say is that it would be impossible for even the most intelligent audience to decipher the meaning of these lines when hearing them spoken on the stage. But I want to make a still further point, and thus bring out the difference between a stage work and a piece of writing which looks like a play yet really isn't one. Now then, suppose the audience for Miss Barnes's *The Antiphon* could be cajoled into studying her play before seeing it: what would be their reward? They could not have an immediate contact with the play until after they had studied it—which means they could never have an immediate contact with it. They would have to know the play by heart to hear it—that is to see it—for the first time! Let me put the matter differently. A really good dramatic work should reveal itself most essentially when produced. I never really understood the Antigone, not of Anouilh, but of Sophocles, until I saw it done on the stage by the Comédie Française. But it is quite clear that no light could be thrown on Miss Barnes's play by any production of it. I have read it through twice, and I am still not sure I have gotten the story in its dramatic details. . .

SOUTH: Can you be so sure it's bad if you don't know what it's about?

NORTH: Oh I know what it's about. Or, to be precise, I know what it means, rather than exactly what happens in it. And this, I think, is the play's fault, not mine. . . *The Antiphon* is an Electra play. The action takes place in a contemporary setting—the time is 1939—and there is no supernatural machinery, which, from my point of view, would be all to the good, if there were only some other kind of machinery—that is, plot—to get the action going. But there is scarcely any action, the play being the end and term of what happened before off-stage. Here, too, we have a modernization of an old myth, but with much more justification, apparently, than in the case of MacLeish's handling of the Job story. Miss Barnes *does* have a reason for modernizing, personalizing her Electra figure, for in *The Antiphon,* the daughter represents to the mother the full horror of what has happened to her

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at the hands of the father, as well as representing all the humiliations women have suffered at the hands of men. Miss Barnes's Electra, parodying the Ghost in *Hamlet*'s "Hamlet, remember me!" says to her mother, "Woman, remember you." But the mother does not have the strength for this, and the play ends with her murder of her daughter. I should add that there are several male characters, including an Orestes and a Pedagogue, all with good English names, of course. And the general theme of the play is rather strong: the horror of what men do to women in making them mothers, and women to men in giving birth to them.

SOUTH: Now that sounds interesting!

NORTH: I don't deny a certain distinction in the writing. But I am judging *The Antiphon* as a play—I don't know if there are any categories for judging a closet-drama. A play has to be capable of being presented on the stage, as even Beddoes's *Death's Jest Book* could be, I believe. Now *The Antiphon* is simply unplayable. I note that on the book jacket Edwin Muir is quoted as saying it would be a "disaster" if this work were not known. The disaster of this work, I should say, is that it cannot be known. For it *cannot make itself known on the stage as its form requires it to do.* And how hard it is to read! I sat up all night over it, and would never have kept on reading if I didn't have my review to write.

SOUTH: I'm going to suggest that nobody read MacLeish's *J.B.* or go to see it either, yet I read it quickly enough, in about half an hour to be exact, and from it turned to the Book of Job which took me all night.

NORTH: In any case, you see what modern verse plays are like.

SOUTH: I still don't see why it should be impossible to write a good one.

NORTH: I would not say that a good verse play is impossible to achieve. What I think is that such an accomplishment is unlikely, and that what is unlikely is hardly a proper object of a sensible man's activity. Now a good dramatist must be fundamentally sensible.

SOUTH: Don't you think T. S. Eliot is?

NORTH: Unquestionably. But just look at his plays. He has been writing prose plays disguised as verse ever since *Family Reunion.* Since that work, which he himself admits was a failure, he has devoted himself to writing a kind of *non-poetic* verse play. The results, if we are to judge by *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Cocktail Party* are works which are fundamentally prosaic—much more so than Chekhov's plays in prose, for instance. Perhaps Mr. Eliot has to write plays in the way he does since his whole sensibility had already been formed on the

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basis of verse when he turned to the theatre. In that case he is a sport, an accident, a chance event in the theatre. . . .

SOUTH: But *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Cocktail Party* are in verse of a sort and they are good plays.

NORTH: Oh I don't deny that. What I deny is that Eliot has succeeded in what is the *main* task of a dramatist, which is to produce a new dramatic system. Ibsen did that, and Strindberg, and Shaw, Pirandello, and even Giraudoux. Eliot did not, though he did create a poetic system before he turned his hand to writing plays. Now my contention is that no play can be truly poetic if it does not express the discovery of a new dramatic system. Thus we get the paradox that all the playrights I mentioned wrote dramas fundamentally more poetic than Mr. Eliot's, though none of them, except for Ibsen in his early phase, wrote plays in verse. Perhaps I can now formulate more clearly what seems to me the almost insuperable difficulty of the verse play in our time. In the past, the creators of new dramatic systems made their discoveries *in verse,* since verse was the accepted medium. It is almost inconceivable that this type of discovery could be made today in verse, for the creation of an adequate verse for stage purposes would exhaust the invention of even the most gifted poet. Mr. Eliot's career in the theater should be a warning that what we are going to get from the effort to bring poetry to the theater will probably not be a revitalization of the theatrical art, but a compromised, flat and diluted poetry, which can scarcely uplift us either on or off the stage. Have I convinced you?

SOUTH: My problem is to convince my readers that I am right about MacLeish's *J.B.*

NORTH: And I must convince mine that Djuna Barnes's *The Antiphon* is no worse than they should have expected.

Lionel Abel

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VARIETY

THE AVANT-GARDE IN FRENCH FICTION

The need for an avant-garde has always been felt in France. For the past fifty years, however, there have been singular changes in its character. Before 1914 the avant-garde led a hard life. By its very nature it was unrecognized by the public. It could be composed of rich men or poor, adventurers like Rimbaud, bourgeois like Gide or important government officials like Claudel—but the fact remained that these people, in the field of their artistic activities, did indeed form a vanguard neglected or despised by a public which in those days was faithfully wedded to academic values.

Immediately after the First World War, everything changed. Since most Frenchmen, at bottom, were no longer entirely in agreement with the social framework in which they lived—even if they profited from it—they acquired a taste for revolt without danger. And this revolt they found in the arts. Those were the days when the Cubists made their fortune, Picasso became the most fashionable of painters and the Surrealists themselves saw their methods and principles vulgarized, so to speak, by the profiteers of rebellion. Jean Cocteau was the most famous of these intermediaries. In 1920, the vanguard was at the Boeuf sur le Toit, when it was not in the salons. The result has been that, ever since, there has been a certain amount of hurrying and pushing to belong to the avant-garde, and everyone ends by having his own. Certain of these groups mark the convergence of different, even opposed, milieux.

For one kind of public, the avant-garde is made up essentially of young people. And it ends by assuming that every young artist is necessarily part of the movement. The Minou Drouet affair having misfired, we are left with Françoise Sagan and Roger Vadim. If one is to believe weeklies such as *Arts* (rightwing) and *L'Express* (leftwing), Françoise Sagan and Roger Vadim,—as witness their collaboration in creating the ballet *Rendez-vous manqué*—now constitute the liveliest core of the 1958 avant-garde. This, on reflection, is rather surprising, since each of these young people in his own field—literature and cinema—seems to have been content to follow an extremely well-travelled road. It is hard to see what discoveries or revolutions they bring us. On the other hand, if *Arts* and *L'Express* are right—and they were joined by the Communist weekly *Les Lettres Francaises*, when Sagan and Vadim explained in its columns that their ballet had failed because it constituted an at-

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tack against bourgeois society—then everything has changed. We are indeed far from the era of Rimbaud, of Gide and Claudel, and even of the Surrealists. The avant-garde public is now the readers of the advice-to-the-lovelorn columns; and the avant-garde films fail in the little cinemas but have great success in the neighborhood houses.

But, as I said at the outset, there is competition among the vanguards. This is particularly true in the literary field, where Sagan's empire is recognized, after all, only by those who have never had anything to do with literature. For there does exist, happily for us, a group of young writers who show the normal avant-garde characteristics. This is to say that they are not read by a large public, but that part of the large public knows their names; that they write with the conviction that they are bringing something truly revolutionary to their art; and that, in order to do this, they obey intransigent rules of their own making, rules which they affirm as ineluctable and universal. I am referring to the little group composed, notably, of Alain Robbe-Grillet, Roland Barthes, Nathalie Sarraute. Michel Butor is usually added to the list—his novel *La Modification* recently won one of the principal literary prizes of the season—but it seems to me that he has nothing in common with this group.

Two very different publications have recently echoed some of the preoccupations of these novelists: the *Figaro Litteraire* and the review *Arguments*. Each did this in its characteristic way. *Arguments*, which is a serious little review, opened its pages to one of the group's theoreticians, Bernard Pingaud, then to several others, critics and writers, partisans or adversaries of the new school. As for the *Figaro Litteraire*, it organized a round table discussion and gathered around Alain Robbe-Grillet several critics as well as a number of authors chosen in such a way that there could be no common language among them.

Here then, according to Bernard Pingaud and Robbe-Grillet, is the present situation of the French novel as seen by those who think of themselves as the pathfinders of the new literary movement.

The novel, in its finished form, dates from the nineteenth century. What was called the "novel" in the seventeenth century has nothing in common with it except the name. The novel of the nineteenth century is built essentially on two elements: character and story, in the sense of plot or anecdote. But character and plot could be the basic elements of the novel only because they were related to a "coherent social order," that is, to bourgeois society. "We are still living in this society," says Bernard Pingaud, "but we no longer believe in it." Consequently, the collapse of society entails that of one

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of its constituent elements. If one no longer believes in a society, one no longer believes in the characters who constitute it. "Sociologically," continues Pingaud, "the individual no longer corresponds to anything. Psychologically, he has become a mask: what we know today of human behavior—and what the novelists have sometimes divined before the psychologists themselves—has done away with the old notion of the singular character, sure of his individuality even in delirium. Betrayed by his social environment, the character has also lost confidence in himself: he can find support neither within himself nor around him."

Frankly, this reasoning is not convincing and it is hard to see why the lack of confidence which one may feel in a given society necessarily entails the character's lack of reality in the eyes of the novelist. We have here, in the thinking of the new school, a hiatus which is all the more serious since it lies precisely at the heart of their theory. But, shaky or solid, what counts most is to determine where this theory takes us.

Character and plot having disappeared from the novel, what is left? The object, replies Robbe-Grillet. And an object without meaning. For if the individual, ceasing to be a character, that is to say, stripped of his psychology, can become an object, the object itself ought to be deprived of all meaning, that is, of all depth. In Balzac we can assume that the description of a waistcoat "means" something: wealth, elegance, dandyism, or on the contrary, poverty, humility, etc. In the novels of the new school, the object is denied this "pragmatic role." "It is no longer there in order to signify material or moral values." We come then to an "objective" literature which proposes to create what Bernard Pingaud calls "the surface novel."

The truth is, when we examine this theory—and without passing judgment on the works which it has inspired—we find a curious nihilism. For, after all, the development of the novel, since the seventeenth century, has taken place, precisely, through successive acquisitions. Before the seventeenth century, narrative works involved heroes, not characters. In the same way, they sought to tell not meaningful stories, but merely tales, of a generally fantastic nature, the only object of which was the amusement of the reader. The novel, with its character and plot, successively conquered the moral, social, historical, and psychological fields. For some time now, it has even entered a new domain, that of philosophical systems or rather visions of the world. By limiting itself to the object, one might imagine that the novel casts off all these acquisitions. According to Robbe-Grillet, this is not the case: "I believe," he says, "that if feelings, psychological movements,

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metaphysics, even morals, exist, all these are in the first instance conveyed by objects." To which the critic Robert Kanters sensibly replied: "I have never yet seen glasses which looked all by themselves, that is, without someone looking through them."

In fact, the achievements of those who have arrived, or who have attempted to arrive, at what Roland Barthes calls "the zero degree of writing," show such diversity that it would seem that the problems they raise are not precisely the same. Only Alain Robbe-Grillet is faithful, entirely faithful, to his doctrine. The result is books that are difficult to read for two reasons: the first is that we are not used to a literally meaningless literature, at least when it is deliberately so. The second is that Robbe-Grillet, according to one critic, ends by "competing with the land-registry." Claude Mauriac, examining the case of Robbe-Grillet in his book, "L'Aliterature Contemporaine" (*Contemporary Aliterature*), quotes this passage from *Le Voyeur*: "There was then, beginning with the window and turning towards the left (that is, counter-clockwise): a chair, a second chair, the dressing-table (in the corner), a wardrobe, a second wardrobe (extending to the second corner), a third chair, the cherrywood bed placed lengthwise against the wall; a very small table. . . ." Let us stop. The writer himself has no more reason to stop than to continue. Every description of this type can always be continued. Furthermore, one wonders, what is the principle behind such prose? Why say "a wardrobe" and a "cherrywood bed"? Of what wood was the wardrobe made? And the chairs? What color were they? Once evocation is replaced by description, the latter becomes endless. Besides, apart from the author's theoretical statements, it is hard to see in what way these objects can "convey" feelings, psychological movements, etc.

What Sartre calls the "anti-novels" of Nathalie Sarraute are more interesting, although they are based on an equally rigid and arbitrary notion. This author also shuns psychology, but she replaces the limitless description of objects by an absolute respect for the apparent banality of human relationships. Her characters exist only by what they say and they say nothing, even when they speak. As Sartre says in his preface to *Portrait d'un Inconnu,* Natalie Sarraute "makes us see the wall of the inauthentic; she makes us see it everywhere. And behind this wall? What is there? Well, precisely, *nothing.*"

To sum up, the experience of this avant-garde has been that of all preceding ones. It made an important discovery: the object, the extended domain of the meaningless. It is true that no person has ever spoken like the heroes of Balzac, who speak only words full of

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meaning. It is true that, in the world in which we live, the meaningless object occupies more space than the novel had hitherto indicated. But, what the school of Robbe-Grillet failed to perceive is that, whatever the truth of such statement, the peremptory conclusions which it drew from them were sterile, if not false, for the simple reason that one cannot make literature out of meaningless objects and inauthentic remarks. A synthesis has probably been achieved, and with great talent, in a book which I've already had occasion to mention, *La Modification,* by Michel Butor. Without renouncing the psychological novel, without depriving himself either of the creation of characters or of the author's right to intervene through his characters ("like a policeman," as Sartre would say), Butor has given a good deal of space to the meaningless object.

But the result has been the opposite of what the theory anticipated. For, in the psychological and *interior* context of Butor's novel, the objects which we thought meaningless have recovered their meaning, but with a new weight and a new presence. So that, thanks to him, the writers of the "zero degree of writing" and of the "anti-novel" have rejoined the masters whom they deny, but to whom they owe much: Joyce, and even Proust.

Jean Bloch-Michel

(*Translated from the French By Celia Kaplan*)

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CORRESPONDENCE

THE BEAT GENERATION

SIRS:

It would seem that Norman Podhoretz, in his article "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," objected more violently to certain instances of socio-ethical non-conformity in the Beat Generation than to its paucity of erudition, as the title of his essay states. It would also seem that his essay was less an attempt at objective literary criticism than it was a kind of ill-concealed rant. . . . Can it be that the Beat Generation's biggest would-be detractors are so taken up by the "violence and madness" which they seem to point out so readily as the exclusive content of Beat literature, that they find no room for the normal functions of literary criticism? . . .

If any of the so-called criticism of the so-called "Beat Generation" needs a rebuttal (or at least an examination of motives) it is Mr. Podhoretz's claim that this whole movement made him nervous. . . . "Next thing you know," Mr Podhoretz says, "he'll be saying that violence is just fine." Well, that's just it. Violence *is* just fine. I don't mean that someone ought to walk up to Mr. Podhoretz and smack him down, but that this generation of writers must resort to violence in literature, a kind of violence that has in such a short time begun to shake us out of the woeful literary sterility which characterized the '40's, to pull us out of what Dudley Fitts called (in his review of William Meredith's new book of verse) "an impoverished time, so far as poetry is concerned."

. . . I have read a great many of these scathing rants that are being palmed off as objective critical studies of the "New Bohemianism," and almost without exception they have come from the small coterie of quasi-novelists or *New Yorker* suburban intellectual types of the late '40's and early '50's which represents so much of what Beat is a reaction against. It seems to me that Beat is less a movement than a reaction. It is a reaction against, let us say to start, fifteen years of sterile, unreadable magazine poetry: poetry, as Mr. Fitts said so well, that is "neo-georgian, preserved from the almost obligatory dullness of the Georgians by a mild freshness of invention and an agreeably disturbing wit." To my mind, this is not what poetry ought to be. And Beat is also a reaction against what Randall Jarrell calls "The Age of Criticism."

. . . There was neither Bohemianism nor any great intellectual rebellion in the '40's, and there was no poetry to speak of. (Poor Dylan Thomas carried the ball all by himself in England, and we all know what happened when eventually he did get to America.) The only persons that caused even a semblance of a literary stir were a few addlebrained individuals mumbling under their breaths something about "creative criticism." There was nothing but one great big void.

I respect Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, Karl Shapiro, Delmore Schwartz, John Berryman, Peter Viereck, George Barker, Stephen Spender, Louis Macniece, and others who were so representative of what poetry was in the '40's, as well as Eberhart, Wilbur, Meredith, Merwin, Bishop, the Pack-Simpson bunch, etc., who represent the academically condoned poetry of the '50's. But I wish to say emphatically that from this entire group of poets (which represents almost twenty years of poetry) we have about five poems of note. . . .

The Beat Generation, while not a movement as such, is a definite reaction to the void [of the '40's]. To deny the obvious immaturity and ingenuous quality of a good bit of the literature

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of this reaction would be absurd, just as it would be to say that all the art of such a parallel movement as Dada was purposeful and valid. . . . As with Dada, Beat represents a line of departure rather than a concrete doctrine. And even if this departure never produces another poem as influential or controversial as Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," there is no doubt in my mind that it will produce better ones. The same is true of Kerouac's *On the Road*. It breaks new ground, and plants new seeds. . . .

[Podhoretz] shows an ignorance about the whole of the Beat reaction. . . . Statements like "Kerouac's 'bop prosody' is not to be confused with bop language itself, which has such a limited vocabulary you couldn't write a note to the milkman in it, much less a novel" show not only a basic ignorance . . . of the role of bop language in our society, but also a complete inability to see its possible function in literature per se. To write a novel in bop language is not the point, no more than it was Shakespeare's *point* to write his plays in Elizabethan English. A novel, play, etc. is about people, the ideas of people, not about language. . . . Of course *On The Road* is unthinkable without bop language, just as *Hamlet* is unthinkable without Elizabethan English. If one thinks the hipster's language meaningless, perhaps it is not entirely the hipster's fault. . . . The point is that the language can be extended and enlivened by just such prosody as Kerouac's if we are not too snobbish to accept it.

Another of Mr. Podhoretz's misconceptions is his rather early-'30's middle class assumption that "Bohemianism, after all, is for the Negro a means of entry into the world of the whites, and no Negro Bohemian is going to cooperate in an attempt to identify him with Harlem or Dixieland:" Harlem is today the veritable capitol city of the Black Bourgeoisie. The Negro Bohemian's flight from Harlem is not a flight from the world of color but the flight of any would-be Bohemian from what Mr. Podhoretz himself calls "the provinciality, philistinism and moral hypocrisy of American life." Dixieland . . . is to traditional jazz what Rock and Roll is to Blues, or Rhythm and Blues—a cheap commercial imitation. The Negro intellectual certainly has no responsibility either for or to it.

Finally, a statement like "The only art the new Bohemians have any use for is jazz" . . . borders on back alley polemics, not at all in the tradition of the "coherent, rational discourse" Mr. Podhoretz says he cherishes. . . .

LeRoi Jones

SIRS:

In the course of delivering some apt and quite valid remarks on the literary inadequacies of Jack Kerouac (PR Spring,) Norman Podhoretz, last quarter, made several comments about hipsters and the Beat Generation which seem in need of qualification. . . .

In its anti-cosmopolitan "readiness to find the source of all vitality and virtue in simple rural types and in the dispossessed urban groups (Negroes, bums, whores)" (I am quoting here from Mr. Podhoretz's article), Mr. Kerouac's Bohemianism echoes at least two major strains in American literature: the Transcendentalist (to which a postscript was provided by Whitman, possibly the most obvious antecedent of Kerouac), and the early realist (Stephen Crane sought the company of Negroes, bums, and whores for a writer's education). Neither of these seems in any great way inimical to the values of the respectable Bohemias; however, I think Mr. Podhoretz has something of a point when he speaks of the new Bohemianism's hostility to civilization. It is not entirely an accident that Mr.

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Kerouac and the Beat Generation arrived with their ideologies at the moment in history at which they did (Mr. Podhoretz makes no suggestion of this). It appears to me that these ideologies represent their answer to a civilization in which death—of a purposeless, gratuitous, and probably collective character—may seem to be the only guarantee offered by life; a civilization, that is to say, which may appear to be dedicated to its own destruction, perhaps by the most brutally violent means imaginable. And I scarcely think that such a conception of civilization need be branded as adolescent, or even as fundamentally hostile to the historical *idea* of civilization. It is rather a conception which has a certain validity, recognizable, I believe, to any reader of the dailies. . . .

The private language, a sort of bop prosody, closely associated with jazz, demonstrates to Mr. Podhoretz "contempt for coherent, rational discourse." "How," he asks, in what appears a sardonic paraphrase of Mr. Kerouac, "can real feelings be expressed in syntactical alnguage?" That this is a question not original with the Beat Generation, that it has been asked, and answered in a variety of astounding ways, by some of the leading writers of the modern age (Joyce and Faulkner come most readily to mind), is not of fundamental importance here. I grant that Mr. Kerouac has not, in his writing, provided an adequate alternative to syntactical language. This is perhaps his most damning weakness. What he has attempted to do is to extend the language of bop beyond its proper limits of reference. . . .

That "The only art the new Bohemians have any use for is jazz," is not entirely true. . . . But jazz is nonetheless very important, and again, as in the case of the private language, the suggestion that it is essentially anti-intellectual or in any way contributory to anti-intellectualism would seem to stem from a condition of being uninitiated. . . .

Mr. Podhoretz's remarks on the Beat Generation's vision of the Negro constitute, I think, a particularly acute case of misunderstanding and calumny. "It will be news to the Negroes to learn that they are so happy and ecstatic," he tells us. "I doubt if a more idyllic picture of Negro life has been painted since certain Southern ideologies tried to convince the world that things were just as fine as fine could be for the slaves on the old plantation. . . . [The picture Mr. Kerouac presents is] not the Negro seen as happy or ecstatic . . . but the Negro whose fundamental condition of life precludes his having . . . disillusioning white ambitions. . . . The Negro is an ideal because he has long lived with and long perceived as his own condition that which the Beat Generation now perceives to be the condition of all civilization (and it need not be automatically assumed that Kerouac is talking about all Negroes); and in his historic response to that condition—his awareness of the inescapable possibility of unreasonable, gratuitous death, and his consequent pursuit of immediate intensity—he serves as an object lesson to Mr. Kerouac's coterie. It is a bit different from the plantation ideology. By the same token it should be evident that Bohemianism, at least the new Bohemianism, is not, for the Negro, as Mr Podhoretz would have us believe, "a means of entry into the world of the whites," but quite the other way around.

The Beat Generation's fondness for vivid emotional states does not necessarily separate them from any but the most ascetic portions of humanity. However, one can distinguish in their insistence upon sensual knowledge an affinity with numerous past philosophies of literature and life (I am

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thinking particularly of the English Romantic poets like Coleridge and De Quincey) which we think of as entirely respectable. If these emotional states are sometimes (although not often) induced with the aid of narcotics, what is involved is not addiction (Mr. Podhoretz is careful to point out that Marijuana is all that is used), but a kind of free-hand experimentation in advanced states of cognition (the sort of thing one would associate more readily with Aldous Huxley—for whom it was scarcely a problem). . . .

Closely linked to the insistence upon sensual knowledge is the Beat Generation's emphasis on sexual activity. Again, this is scarcely original, either in its literary aspect or in the history of Bohemianism, or even, for that matter, in the history of mature philosophy. What is original is that sex is not to the new Bohemians a means of revolt against social stricture (Mr. Podhoretz recognizes this), but in itself an end: an advanced state of sensual knowledge, and more significantly, an affirmation of life in the face of a condition of prospective death represented by their vision of civilization. . . .

It is perhaps its attraction to criminality that most concerns Mr. Podhoretz about the Beat Generation. Stealing cars, pushcarts, and groceries appears to be the extent of the underworld activity of Mr. Kerouac's characters and, presumably, of his followers in the new Bohemianism . . . (I have not yet heard of any rapists, assaulters, or murderers giving credit to the movement for their escapades), but Mr. Podhoretz suggests, mentioning some remarks of Norman Mailer's on Hipsterism, that recent instances of vicious brutality among American youth stem from the same spirit that activates the Beat Generation. . . . [But these are] more readily associated with another literature entirely—that of the

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Gory Generation rather than the Beat one. What is really important here is that Mr. Podhoretz and Mr. Mailer are not talking about the same things; neither of them gets down to saying what he thinks the secrets of human energy are, although it is clear that they have entirely different ideas. Mr. Mailer believes (to paraphrase from the article Mr. Podhoretz mentions) that a movement in the direction of instinct and being and the secrets of human energy would liberate in man much more of creativity than of murderousness, and would perhaps prevent him from destroying himself (which, it is implied, he is fully prepared to do—collectively—and as the next logical step in the civilization he has constructed in *opposition* to instinct and being and the secrets of human energy).

Mr. Podhoretz, quite obviously, would not go along with this, or else he would not get nervous; and since he would not go along with this, what his article ultimately amounts to is a sort of conviction on the basis of guilt by association of ideas. However, the ideas are not really associated. There is nothing especially original about this. In fact it is no more original than the Beat Generation.

David Fitelson

SIRS:

The H-bomb is rapidly becoming the last refuge of the lazy-minded: invoke the mushroom cloud and all issues will be settled, all phenomena explained, all idiocies justified. Our civilization, Mr. Fitelson tells us, is pursuing collective death, and the Beat boys represent a response to this condition: eat, drink, be merry, and take tea, for tomorrow we die. I don't think that Beat has much to do with the threat of collective death. It has appeared at this "moment in history" (to borrow Mr. Fitelson's impressively resonant phrase) for the same reason, in my opinion, that adolescent crime has been spreading at this "moment in history"—because there is a power vacuum in our society created by the inability of the educated middle class (and of the intellectuals in their sphere) to supply authoritative standards to guide the young. Left to themselves, the kids make their own rules—the rules of the street—just as the Beat boys make their own rules for literature, defining carelessness as spontaneity, incoherence as clarity, drunkenness as vitality, and inarticulateness as eloquence. Control is "chicken" and subtlety is "crap," both in the street-gang and among the Beats. *Of course* —to jump to Mr. Jones for a minute —Beat is a "reaction" to the "academically condoned" literature of the last twenty years, but there are good reactions and bad (aren't there?); this one is bad. If the failure of the educated middle class is at the root of juvenile delinquency today, it is equally true that the failure of the intellectuals lies in the background of Beat. But can any good, either for life or literature, come of a "reaction" based on the ethos I described in my article? No, Mr. Jones, we don't need violence, we need better writing, more critical thinking, and deeper feeling. I tried to show through quotation and analysis that Kerouac's novels are distinguished by a poverty of emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic resources, an ineptitude of expression, and an inability to make anything dramatically meaningful, and I related these qualities to the attitudes toward life exhibited in *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*. If that isn't literary criticism, Mr. Jones, what is? Praise, with a few gentle demurrers as to the felicity of this or that line?

Now to specific points. There's nothing wrong per se with liking bums and whores, and I wasn't attacking Kerouac or anyone else for preferring

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the company of one kind of person to another. What I was getting at (and here, I admit, I had in mind Norman Mailer's appeal to the socialist readers of *Dissent* to form a popular front of protest with the hipster) was simply that the Beat rebellion comes, if it can be interpreted politically at all, from the right, not the left. Mr. Fitelson's reference to Whitman, Crane, and the Transcendalists is irrelevant, because the question is not *whether* you like bums and whores but *why* you like them and the literary or ideological use you make of your fondness. I think I demonstrated quite clearly in my article that the "populism" of Kerouac's work is enlisted into the service of a violent anti-intellectualism and that "bop prosody" and the passion for jazz are weapons in the same cause. I didn't say that a reliance on non-syntactical language necessarily expresses "contempt for coherent, rational discourse"—if Mr. Fitelson had ever read Joyce attentively, he would have known that the non-syntactical language of *Ulysses* is not only coherent and rational but almost monstrously articulate; all I said was that Kerouac's prose *does* express such contempt. Can Mr. Fitelson show me up by citing chapter and verse in Kerouac's fiction? Nor did I imply that an interest in jazz always involves hostility to intellect; I said that Beat's interest in jazz most emphatically does. I would be happy to learn that I was mistaken, but neither Mr. Fitelson nor Mr. Jones provides any evidence to the contrary. Mr. Jones, in fact, disingenuously distorts my remarks about "bop prosody" —though I must say I get off easy in his letter compared to the treatment he gives poor Shakespeare. "To write a novel in bop language" (and thereby to reduce the possible range of expression to the three alternatives of grunting, groaning, or drooling), Mr. Jones, *is* Kerouac's point, while

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Shakespeare's point was to write plays in *English* (and thereby to avail himself of all the resources, both literary and colloquial, that the language afforded in his day). The difference between Elizabethan English and hipster slang is that the one was a living language—richer and more flexible, incidentally, than English became when it was formalized around the end of the 17th century in the interest of greater "scientific" precision—and the other a pure construct with no vital relation either to contemporary speech or to the best literary traditions. If Mr. Jones thinks that "the language can be extended and enlivened by just such prosody as Kerouac's," he must be consulting a newspeak dictionary. How in the name of Fowler can a language be *extended* by a "prosody" whose main purpose is to confine it within the limits of a willfully inarticulate jargon, and how can it be *enlivened* by a principled refusal to draw on all its reserves and a determination to base poetry and fiction on the artificial lingo of a group which believes that language itself is an encumbrance to expression?

Whether or not the new Bohemians care about any art other than jazz is, of course, a matter of fact, and since Mr. Fitelson and Mr. Jones seem to be "initiates" of the movement, I'm willing to take their word for it that I exaggerated on that particular point. Nevertheless, Beat writing, such as it is, fails to support their contention, and the quality of the interest in literature exhibited, say, in *The Subterraneans* is (to put it charitably) sophomoric.

The question of Negroes in the Beat ethos is more serious. I could quote godfather Rexroth himself to the effect that Kerouac is guilty of "Crow-Jimism" and let it go at that, but I do want to make it clear to Mr. Fitelson that the words "ecstatic" and "true-hearted" come from *On the Road,* not from my own nasty polemical mind. And I also want to defend myself against the charges of "calumny" (Fitelson) and "middle class misconception" (Jones). In the paragraph under contention, I attacked Kerouac for the insulting assumption that dark-skinned peoples (he mentions Mexicans and Japanese as well as Negroes) are more spontaneous than whites because they are more "primitive," and I cited Ned Polsky's observation that this kind of thinking was "an inverted form of keeping the nigger in his place." I then went on to say: "But even if it were true that American Negroes, by virtue of their position in our culture, have been able to retain a degree of primitive spontaneity, the last place you would expect to find evidence of this is among Bohemian Negroes. Bohemianism, after all, is for the Negro a means of entry into the world of the whites, and no Negro Bohemian is going to cooperate in the attempt to identify him with Harlem or Dixieland." By which I meant that a Negro Bohemian presumably wants as little to do with the stereotypes—whether pat-on-the-head affectionate, like Kerouac's, or crackerishly hostile—of the Negro character and with the constricted possibilities of a segregated Negro society as a white Bohemian from the midwest (or from a Brooklyn immigrant neighborhood, for that matter) would want to do with small-town "friendliness" and philistinism. Mr. Jones insists that Negro intellectuals take no responsibility for Harlem or Dixieland—which (see the quote above) is exactly what I said. He also claims that the Negro Bohemian's flight from Harlem is not a flight from the world of color, but from the world of the bourgeoisie. Maybe so, but isn't it also true that the world into which the Negro Bohemian has escaped is a white world in the sense that it is free of the restrictions suffered by the

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Negro (but not by the white to anything like the same degree) in a segregated environment? At any rate, we have it on the authority of the Negro sociologist E. Franklin Frazier that the "Black Bourgeoisie" (a term he himself coined, I believe) is far more bourgeois in the way Mr. Jones uses the word than the white middle class of the '50's.

On the issue of "vivid emotional states" raised by Mr. Fitelson in connection with sex and drugs, I would say only that anyone who needs the H-bomb to justify sex as an end in itself and who needs drugs to achieve sensual satisfaction deserves pity, not disciples. Where is the "affirmation of life" in all this? Where is the spontaneity and vitality? It sounds more like an affirmation of death to me (and I think Coleridge and De Quincey would have agreed).

A final word about the question of civilization *vs.* instinct. I certainly don't go along with Norman Mailer's oversimplified idea that our civilization has been built on an opposition to "instinct and being and the secrets of human energy" (nobody knows what those "secrets" are, Mr. Fitelson, except maybe the followers of Reich), and I don't see the hipster as the herald of a revolution to liberate our imprisoned energies—quite the contrary. Our civilization is defective and afflicted with rot, and I have no doubt whatever that we pay too high a price in repression and "discontent" for the benefits we get, but it seems to me a piece of sheer lunacy to suggest that the remedy lies in condoning those forces which, far from tending toward greater creativity and spiritual health, represent a vicious assault on the only protections we have against political and cultural barbarism.

Norman Podhoretz

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